DEATH HAS RED HAIR—A Tale of Alien Doom—By GREYE LA SPINA

SEPTEMBER

Weird Tales

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*

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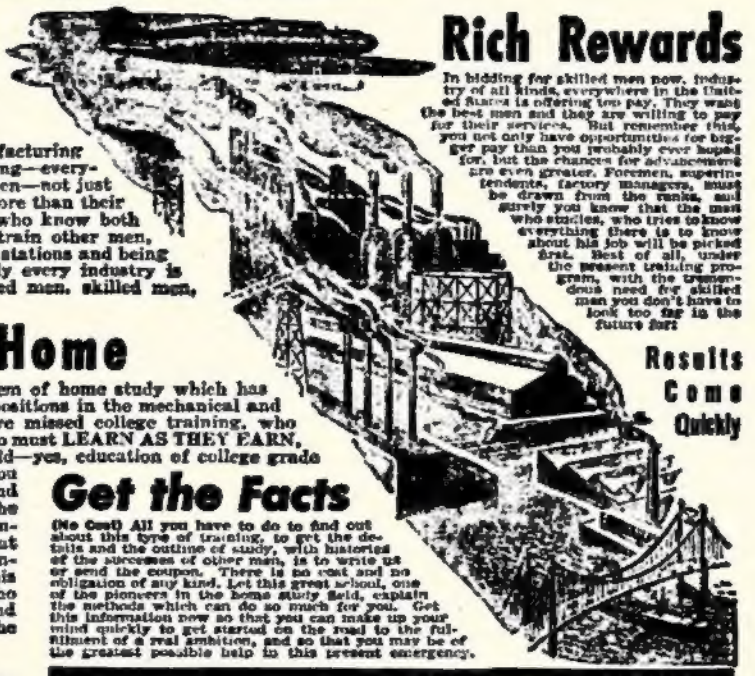

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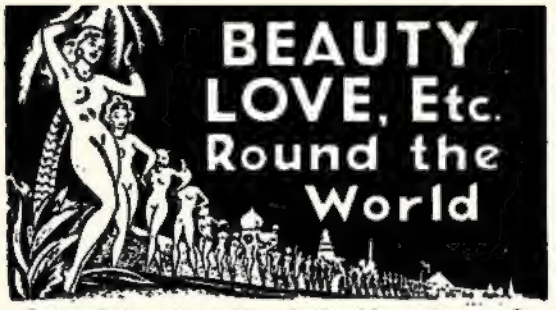

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Satan's Bondage

A Werewolf Western

By MANLY BANISTER

THE desert seemed molten when seen through the windshield of the green coupé. That was because of the angle the rays of the afternoon sun made with the glass, and Kenneth Mulvaney was driving directly into the glare.

The car labored up an incline, pacing a whirling dust-devil on the climb. Incandescent boulders shimmered along the

You're going to get the werewolf's slant on life—as you read how these accursed man-beasts roam the American West in a hellish quest for human food!

rough, rutted way. Dessicated cacti showed dusty green against the ochre and yellow of desert background. On the horizon, blue hills wavered in Mulvaney's vision, dim and indistinct. He mopped the sweat from his forehead for the dozenth time, clinging with one hand to the wretchedly twisting wheel.

"God, what a road!"

The engine punctuated his exclamation with a sharp cough, gave a straining wheeze and died.

A glance at the instrument panel discovered the red of the thermometer had squeezed as far to the right as it could possibly go. Boiling water plunked tunefully in the radiator. He switched off the ignition with a motion of abrupt disgust.

Nothing for it now but to sit out here on this damned desert until the engine

cooled—if it ever would under this blazing sun. Now that the machine was no longer moving, the heat clamped in upon him with reeking fingers. The sun was a burning lance that thrust through the top of the car and into his skull.

Enough of that was enough, he decided. He crawled from behind the wheel into the dust and pulverized grit of the roadway.

"A *hell* of a road," he remarked and eyed the twisting length of it along the way he had come. Dust-devils galloped playfully—writhing brown towers with roots in the baking earth and crests smudging the blue-tinted brass of the sky.

There was water in the luggage compartment. A good drink would lower Lizzie's fever. Dust spurted from under his shoe-soles as he trudged forward with the five-gallon gasoline tin in his grip.

He lifted the hood, took caps off water-can and radiator, and stood back as a cloud of steam first spurted, then drifted into the astringent heat of the air. When the cloud had thinned somewhat, he tilted the can and permitted the precious water to gurgle throbbingly into the overheated intestines of the radiator.

"Need help, Mister?"

Mulvaney hadn't heard the girl approach. He nearly dropped the water-tin from surprise.

"You gave me a start," he said, controlling himself. He focused the glance of his gray eyes upon her face.

SHE wasn't smiling—but it seemed that she was. The set of her face was made for laughter. Her eyes were blue. Her hair was golden blond; her complexion well-tanned. She was dressed in some sort of boots and breeches arrangement, designed for hiking. Dust covered her slim figure from the toes of the awkward boots to the grayed bandanna that held her vagrant curls in place.

"I wear it to keep the sun from doing unmentionable things to my hair," she explained. The corners of her full mouth twitched. "Not to speak of boiling my brain in its own water!"

He set the water-tin carefully at his feet.

"Where'd you come from? I'd no idea there was a soul within miles!"

A shadow crossed her face.

"So there isn't," she said strangely. Then, "I was hiking along just over the rise." She gestured. "I heard your car thumping up the hill. I was all set to thumb a ride when it stopped. So I came back to see what's up."

"The motor overheated and conked on me," he explained.

He eyed her speculatively, almost prompted to ask what business brought her on foot into this God-forgotten wilderness. He wondered if it was possible she were bound for the same place he was. He forced an end to his speculation.

"She'll be cool enough to start off again pretty soon," he said. "You're welcome to ride along as far as I go."

There was a certain blankness in her gaze that troubled him. Her blue eyes clouded briefly.

"How far *are* you going?" More than ordinarily curious, the tone was.

"Wereville."

He wondered if it were only imagination that made him believe she gasped as he pronounced the name. It was devilishly hot. Enough to fry your brains and make you imagine almost anything. She didn't ask why he was going to Wereville.

He took advantage of their momentary silence to replace the water-tin in the luggage compartment. She stood silently in the blazing sun, shoe-soles sunk into the powdery loess. Her look as she regarded the dead motor was as if she hoped by some alchemy of glance to bring it to life again.

"I think it ought to run now," she said.

He tramped forward through the dust and peered at the thermometer. The crimson line had shrunk somewhat, although it still hovered near the danger-line.

"A few more minutes, anyway," he told her.

DUST churned from under the wheels of the green coupé. Its engine was functioning wonderfully again.

Mulvaney had never seen ten such miles. That's what a native of Lastwater had said it was. Lastwater was on the highway. Wereville was in the foothills of the mountains looming bluely ahead. In between were ten scorching miles. The road they were on—if it could be called a road—led to Wereville and a few isolated ranches in the mountain valleys.

They passed a cowboy cantering along on a paint pony—a thin, gray-faced man with the clean look of the open about him. A ten-gallon hat shaded his lean face. He reined to one side, waved as they passed. Then he inclined forward in his saddle, cut short the salutation and sat rigidly, staring. Mulvaney observed the dancing image in his rear-vision mirror and chucked.

"Almost friendly for a minute, wasn't he?"

Already the cowboy was hidden in the dust that swirled behind them. The girl did not turn to look. She shrugged only slightly, and the expression of her eyes was singularly blank.

"You live on a ranch out this way?"

She shook her head.

If she didn't live on a ranch, she must—He put the thought into words.

"Then you must live in Wereville."

She turned her head quickly and stared full in his face. A faint expression of scorn curled her red lips, and her eyes were flashingly cold.

"Suppose I do? So what?"

The tone of her voice was sharp, combative. He recoiled from the fierce glow of her expression. A sterner man would have been tongue-tied. Mulvaney was completely stopped.

In spite of her sudden, wolfish ferocity, he felt that her attitude was not meant for him. Somehow, he realized vaguely that she directed it at the cowboy they had left sitting his paint pony by the roadside.

The question Mulvaney had been about to ask her was stilled on his tongue. Chance was, she couldn't help anyway. Better to wait until he got to Wereville and make his inquiries there. Then he thought of the grim figure the cowboy had made after his initial gesture of friendliness. Something very like a chill prickled along his spine.

It was an eerie feeling he had that all was not well with the town of Wereville. He recalled vaguely things he had read about range wars. Could he be getting into something like that here? If so, the girl and the cowboy evidently belonged to opposing factions. That would explain this slight incident—or would it? He shrugged dismally and scanned the road ahead.

They were skirting the shoulder of a tan hill. In front of them the dusty green foliage of a clump of cottonwoods glimmered in the sun. A small herd of cattle browsed on the grass that grew sparsely. A creek tumbled out of a ravine here, spanned by a wooden bridge. The girl laid her hand on his arm. The touch electrified him.

"Stop here," she commanded.

He eased in the clutch and let the green coupé roll to a halt at the approach of the bridge.

The road continued straight ahead, angling across the desert.

"Wereville is that way," the girl said, pointing across the bridge, toward the ravine. "I'll walk in from here. You better go back to Lastwater—or stop at one

of the ranches hereabouts and go back in the morning."

She started to get out.

"Forgive me for not telling you sooner." She smiled slightly. "It was awfully hot and I was tired of walking."

He looked at her with blank amazement.

"But you don't understand! *I'm* going to Wereville, too!"

She shook her head. "You *thought* you were. You're going back to Lastwater—really."

She slid toward the door.

"Here!" Mulvaney said. "You can't do that! I'm taking you to Wereville!"

Her eyes grew stormy.

"Don't be a fool, Mister—whatever-your-name-is! They won't let you in! Go back now and save yourself trouble!"

"I'm not in the habit of saving myself trouble," he said grimly and let out the clutch.

THE green coupé nosed into the bridge-approach and roared into the cottonwood grove. Just in time, Mulvaney plunged his foot upon the brake. The coupé halted with not six inches separating its front bumper and the massive palings of a wooden gate.

A lean stranger in dusty overalls sat hunched on the top rail, meditatively chewing a blade of grass.

"Ain't no passage beyond this gate, Mister!" he called out.

Mulvaney's glance swiveled to a weather-beaten sign. WEREVILLE—5 MILES, it said, and had an arrow pointing off up the ravine.

"You had to be smart," the girl said. "I told you so—but thanks for the lift."

She got out and waved to the man perched above them.

"Hi, Jim!"

"Hi, Joan! Your paw and maw is waiting for you. Better git along."

"You can't block a public thoroughfare like this!" Mulvaney cried out hotly.

The man Jim pointed silently to a cloth sign tacked upon the gate. It bore the signature of the Sheriff, proclaimed that intruders were trespassers, and such would be prosecuted.

"I don't care what that says," Mulvaney thrust at him. "I've got business in Wereville, and I'm going there!"

"What business you got in Wereville?" Jim said, and whistled softly.

Three men armed with shotguns stepped out of leafy concealment. The eldest of the trio had a white beard. They stared levelly at Mulvaney.

"No strangers. It's for your own good," the beard said flatly.

The girl was watching Mulvaney with something like grim amusement in her glance.

"Maybe you'll give up now," she suggested.

He surveyed the armed group doubtfully. They appeared menacing enough, but not overly dangerous.

"Damn it—no!" he explained. "I'm *not* a stranger!"

"What's that you say?"

The bearded man stepped closer and peered at him through the bars of the gate.

"I'm not a stranger," Mulvaney repeated. "I—I—well, I belong here!"

"Who are you?"

"Kenneth Mulvaney. I was born in Wereville. I left with my parents while I was still a baby."

"Tod and Mary Mulvaney?" questioned the oldster.

"The same."

The man Jim had clambered down off the gate and joined the armed group. Mulvaney remained angrily at the wheel of the green coupé. The girl Joan—he wondered vaguely what other name she had—regarded him with startled wonder. The

graybeard harangued the group in low tones, then turned back to Mulvaney. Mulvaney stuck his head from behind the windshield.

"Well?"

"I'm Hank Simpson. Where's your folks, boy?"

Mulvaney hesitated. "—Dead, sir," he said reluctantly. "When I was still a boy. I was raised in an orphanage."

"You remembered your people coming from Wereville?"

Mulvaney crushed back a desire to resent Simpson's questions.

"No, sir," he said truthfully. "I read about it in my mother's diary. I thought maybe—maybe I might find some relatives here."

Simpson shook his bearded head, pale eyes bright.

"No. Tod and Mary had no kin. But if you're who you say you are, you've got friends. If you're not, may God help you. He's the only one can!"

Hank Simpson stepped aside and jerked his head to the others. Watching Mulvaney curiously, they came forward and swung the great gate wide.

THE green coupé left the quartet standing by the gate and chugged along the narrow road. The way rose gently, twisting through the narrow canyon. It followed the course of the creek, sometimes crossing it only to recross it farther upstream. The narrow bridges were rickety, and Mulvaney eased the coupé over them with trepidation.

He felt like Alice in Wonderland. Things were getting curiouser and curiouser. He didn't pretend to understand what was going on here, what subtle cause prompted the people of the valley to bar their town to strangers. Mulvaney recalled the words of the service station proprietor at Lastwater. He had stopped there to get gas.

"A queer bunch up there," the fellow had told him, gnawing a generous chunk from a plug of tobacco. "Holed up in that valley since God knows when. Nobody ever *goes* to Wereville—them that does, comes right back. Never say nothin', neither. 'Shamed o' gettin' run out, I guess." He laughed sharply and leered at Mulvaney.

He glanced sideways at the girl in the seat beside him. Beyond a certain amount of reticence, she had displayed no peculiarity that he could discern. She had seemed tense on the journey across the desert—especially after they had passed the cowboy—but that seemed gone now. She laughed and the tips of her teeth showed white between red, half-parted lips.

Only her eyes were the same—almost ingenuously blank. And the men at the gate. A sinister feeling shook him. Their eyes were the same. It baffled him. He could not know that his own bore the same look.

"It's all very confusing," he said drawing the words from nothingness.

She smiled briefly. "I suppose it is." Shadow hovered over her full, soft mouth. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know," she said slowly. "As long as you're one of us."

Her acceptance of him as one of the people of the valley comforted him, at the same time that it repelled him strangely. He steered the coupé expertly around a curve, waiting for her to continue.

"It's the ranchers, of course."

He nodded. "That explains the cowboy?"

She divined what he meant. "Yes. He recognized me. I suppose he did, anyway. I'm in Lastwater frequently. Everyone for miles around is there at one time or another. We're poison around here, Mister Mulvaney."

"Cut the formality," he said. "You don't look poison to me."

"You're one of us," she said simply, as if that explained everything. "There's been a kind of feud between our people and the ranchers for more years than I can remember. It's more bitter now."

"So bad you have to guard the road to keep strangers out?"

"Of course. Besides, the moon is full tonight. We're particularly careful now."

Mulvaney furrowed his forehead. Rangeland hate must be at fever pitch to make them fear an attack in the night. Whatever side the girl was on, he felt, must be the right side. So he pictured the ranchers as inconsiderate monsters.

The walls of the canyon sloped and fell away. The green coupé thrust itself around a bend and into as beautiful a valley as Kenneth Mulvaney had ever seen.

The valley bottom was a prairie perhaps a mile wide by twice as long. The creek meandered through its middle, bisecting green and yellow fields with its line of standing cottonwoods. On either side, pine-clad slopes rose steeply, stepping up toward the head of the valley.

THE quick glance Mulvaney cast in that direction chilled him. A mountain guarded the valley's upper end. Even in the sunlight, it had seemed somber and brooding, like a giant wolf frozen in solid granite, overshadowing the valley with its baleful presence. Mulvaney spared it another quick glance, and the feeling it inspired in him increased. He shrugged and avoided looking at it, turning his attention to the valley.

A quarter of a mile ahead, a small aggregation of houses glinted in the rays of the westering sun. Details were hidden in the foliage of the many trees that sheltered the town.

"Wereville," the girl said. "It isn't much—only a dozen or so houses—a general store—a blacksmith shop—population sixty-three."

Grazing cattle were brown dots in the fields around the town. Wheat stood waist high, rippling with golden waves on either side of the road. The blaze of the sun was fierce and mellow at once. The green coupé streamed into Wereville like a comet preceding a fanned-out tail of tan dust particles.

Most—if not all—of the town's population was gathered in the square in front of the general store. Mulvaney braked the dusty car to a halt near the tail of a bay mare tied to the hitching rack. The mare's flanks were covered with dust and sweat. The animal was winded as if from a hard ride.

Mulvaney squinted through the insect-spotted windshield at the group facing them.

Sullen expressions were there. Some of the women were fierce in their looks, as though resenting his intrusion into their town. The female of the species has the more protective nature, he thought.

His eye caught sight of a familiar figure in blue denim, loafing in the foreground. Jim—the man at the gate. A short-cut, Mulvaney thought fleetingly. Jim had taken advantage of it to ride ahead and warn the villagers of their coming.

The girl opened her door with a shrill screech of metal and got out. The crowd kept silent. An elderly man stepped forward and the girl greeted him.

"I'm back, Dad."

"Joan! Who's that feller with you?"

She explained rapidly as Mulvaney got out beside her. Then she caught sight of the man who had ridden the mare from the gate. She stopped abruptly.

"Why—there's Jim! He could have told you!"

"He told us what this feller said. How do we know it's true? Maybe it's a trick."

Mulvaney felt seriously uneasy before the menacing look of the crowd. There was something about them—a wolfish

ferocity held in abeyance—that made his flesh crawl.

"Look!" the girl cried. "Look at his eyes!"

Mulvaney felt the intensity of the crowd's gaze focussed on his face. He was embarrassed.

"I can prove I'm Kenneth Mulvaney," he said.

He brought a packet of papers from the pocket of his jacket and held them out to Joan's father. Hoofs clattered across the square.

Mulvaney looked up and met the fierce, lupine gaze of the man on the black stallion. The beast reared, and its rider leaned out of the saddle, seized the papers from Mulvaney's grasp.

"I'll look at these!"

The valley people fell back with respect and awe. The horseman was darkly, cruelly handsome. Black eyes darted over the papers he took from the packet. It contained Mulvaney's birth certificate, a picture of his parents, and his mother's diary bound with a faded blue ribbon. The man held the picture out for the townspeople to see.

"That's Tod and Mary, all right," agreed Joan's father.

THE attitude of the crowd changed perceptibly. Their expressions became friendly. All but the lupine rider of the black stallion. He passed the packet back to Mulvaney. He roamed his glance possessively to Joan. Mulvaney felt his scalp tighten as the probing stare rested on the soft, warm curves of the girl's body. The eyes came back to Mulvaney. Thin lips smiled sneeringly.

"It takes more than credentials to hold your proper place in this valley, Mulvaney. We don't run alone here."

With these cryptic words, he wheeled the restive, wild-eyed stallion and galloped away across the town square.

"Who does he think *he* is?" Mulvaney queried resentfully.

"Bock Martin," Joan said quietly.

"Bock's a hard feller to get along with," her father added. He held out his hand. "My name's Jordan. Welcome to Were Valley, Mulvaney."

Mulvaney shook hands. "Thanks. I'll probably not stay long. I just came to find if I had any folks living here. . . ."

"You'll stay," Jordan said, peering at him. Mulvaney could not describe the look—the queer lack of expression—that was in his eyes. "Few ever leave," Jordan went on. "Those who do generally come back—unless something happens." He turned to his daughter. "Find out anything in town?"

"The place was practically deserted. Even the priest was gone."

"Where's your horse? Leave it at the gate?"

Mulvaney lifted his head. The girl had been walking when he picked her up. She shrugged slightly.

"It's dead. One of the ranchers shot it."

"Shot your horse!"

A sigh went up from the villagers.

"Yes. I was taking the shortcut through Baxter's Canyon. A man was hidden behind a rock, and he shot my horse. He shouted that that was just a warning, and I heard his horse's hoofs as he rode away. I never did see him."

Jordan's face was stony. He put his arm around her.

"What did he say, honey?"

Her lip curled. "Said our kind wasn't wanted in these parts. Said we better 'git'."

Jordan pulled thoughtfully at his chin.

"They're gathering against us," he muttered. "That priest—!"

He shook his head somberly and took Mulvaney's arm.

"I suppose you'll want to move into your old home, lad. It's just like your

daddy and mother left it. I'll take you there."

Before driving from the square, Mulvaney cast a glance about in search of Joan. But she had slipped away with the dispersing crowd and he did not see her.

Mulvaney was not surprised to learn that the house his parents had occupied was vacant and waiting for him. He was not even surprised to discover that it was clean and well-kept in spite of the twenty years or more it had been separated from its owners. The people of the valley look after their own, he thought to himself.

"We figured they'd come back sooner or later," Jordan told him. "We kept it ready."

No, Mulvaney was not surprised. There was something about the atmosphere of this strange valley, its town and its people that precluded the possibility of such feeling.

Long shadows had begun to steal across the valley bottom when Jordan left him in the large, frame dwelling that was his by birthright. He stood in the middle of the worn carpet in the living room. Outside the window, the leaves of a dusty cottonwood fluttered in the evening breeze.

Mulvaney brought his glance inside with an effort. He looked lingeringly over the old-fashioned furnishings. A sofa, a platform rocker, a couple of straightback chairs, what-not shelves in the corners, loaded with bric-a-brac. It was here—in this very room, amid these same surroundings—he had played when he was a baby.

He was home. He took time out to think of that. Home. He had lived from his sixth to his eighteenth year in an orphanage. The following seven years he had spent wandering from job to job. Never long in one place, never one to make friends, he had always been restless, unquiet. Was this what he had hunted all those years—without knowing it? He was home now.

He sat suddenly on the sofa, and it creaked under his weight. He rubbed his hand over his eyes. He had driven quite a distance today. He was tired. He wasn't hungry at all.

Twilight came to the valley. Gloom rushed in to fill the corners of every room in the old house.

Mulvaney stood erect at last and groped his way to the lamp he had observed earlier on the dining table. He struck a light and held it to the oily wick.

Odd people—an odd place. He resented Bock Martin—the way he had looked at Joan. He saw the girl's lovely young face in his imagination. A pleasant tingle passed through his flesh.

He held the lamp high to light his passage up the creaking stairs. The whole place was wrong somehow. He felt it even more strongly now. He couldn't place the wrongness. Gave him an eerie feeling, though.

In a bedroom upstairs, he placed the lamp on a dresser. The wick flared, casting grotesque flickers throughout the room. He leaned forward and scanned himself in the glass. He was Kenneth Mulvaney, just as he always had been. He would not have been surprised to find himself different, too.

He recalled Joan telling the crowd to look at his eyes. He squinted, frowning. There was a difference there, somehow. They seemed to lack their normal luster. The look of them reminded him of— The valley people! It was the look that characterized their eyes!

He could not understand the significance of this fact, but it troubled him. He turned around to survey his surroundings and reeled with his discovery. Sweat gathered on his forehead as he recognized now the wrongness that had haunted him. It had been the same with Joan Jordan—with the valley people—and now—himself. His body, as hard, physical, opaque as ever

did not cast a shadow in the shine of the lamp!

One takes a shadow for granted. To be without one is—is—Mulvaney did not know the portent of it. He was shaken with the discovery. He blew out the lamp quickly and got into bed in the dark.

No shadow! The argent moonlight splashing through the window fascinated him. A full moon was rising above the ridge along the eastern rim of the valley. Its orb lighted the land with a weird, eldritch illumination. It lay in a puddle on his floor and rose in a silver tide along the opposite wall.

The moonglow soothed his senses. He believed his imagination was overwrought. Maybe a touch of the sun. He drifted hazily in the shadowy borderland of consciousness.

FIVE miles over the ridges and tangled ravines from Kenneth Mulvaney and his troubled thoughts, big Sam Carver shook his grizzled white head and gestured with mahogany hands.

"If you ain't right," he rumbled at the small, dark-skinned man, "we'll be in a mess. Ever been a laughing-stock before?"

The small man was dressed in black, white collar turned back to fore. He was a priest and his name was Father d'Arcy.

"It is my duty to stamp out evil where I find it."

His appearance and accent marked him as French-Canadian.

"How long have you had this trouble?" he went on.

Carver shrugged. "Maybe two, three years. We've always had trouble in winters—when the snow drove the wolves out of the mountains. Before, we drove our critters to summer pasture up in the mountains. Don't figger we lost many then. But the ground's barren up there any more. We pasture 'em in the valleys all summer long—an' that's how our trouble comes. Never knew wolves to come down to the foothills in summertime."

"Yet you think I may be wrong; the wolves attack only when the moon is full?"

"Seems like its always happened that way," the rancher responded wearily. "Full moon last month—and the month before—and before that. There's a monstrous pack o' them—they ruin a terrific lot o' good beef."

"I know. Financially, the wolves are hitting you hard. But how about tonight?"

"Don't worry. Every rancher in these parts is ready. I'm ridin' out to join them pretty soon."

"The water?"

"Yeah. Crazy idea, though."

The priest shrugged.

"You have supplied yourself with a mirror? And the silver—you did with it as I ordered?"

"Yes—my God! Didn't I tell you we'll be the laughing stock if you ain't right about this?"

The priest made a steeple of his fingers and regarded the structure with calm meditation.

"The *loup-garou* cannot withstand these things," he said.

The rancher snorted weakly.

"If I ain't crazy now, I'm goin' to be when this is over! I'd as soon think those folks in the other valley were siccin' their dogs on our cattle. Though I've no doubt they've a hand in it somewheres."

"Very likely," agreed the priest.

"'Course, Yancey had no right shootin' that girl's horse out from under her today an' leavin' her afoot in the desert. I gave him the bloody devil. The sooner those people leave these parts, the better off we'll be. But I don't truck with shootin' horses out from under women."

"Getting back to the wolves, Mr. Carver. You don't really suspect those are dogs attacking your cattle?"

"No. Slim says they ain't dog-tracks. Slim used to trap wolves for the bounty. When he says wolf, I have to believe him."

"You have set traps for these wolves?"

"Of course."

"And the wolves avoid them—I know. They have the cunning of man. Have any of your riders ever seen these . . . wolves?"

"Sure. Shot at 'em, too. Missed."

"Perhaps," reflected the priest. "Perhaps not. You don't miss with silver. These *loups-garous*—"

"You better be right," the big rancher murmured. He stood up and combed his fingers through his shock of white hair. "Hateful damned business! You staying here, *padre?* I'm ridin' out to meet the boys. See you when I get back."

"I will still be here," the priest said, smiling confidently.

KENNETH MULVANEY opened his eyes in the dark. Moonlight no longer flooded the wall. There was only a faint reflection from the argent puddle that spilled across the foot of his bed.

The voice of Joan Jordan sounded in the room.

"You're awake now."

He swiveled his head, blinking in consternation. The moonlight glowed on the naked body of the girl sitting at his feet. He started to sit up, then drew back, ashamed for her. Her eyes gleamed feverishly bright. White breasts throbbed with the rapidity of her breathing. She murmured in ecstasy.

"Isn't it a *lovely* moon!"

Words strangled in Mulvaney's throat.

"After all," he broke out hoarsely. "Isn't this a bit—?"

He choked then, and his face and neck burned. The girl laughed, matching the silver of her voice against that of the moonglow. The sound of it was naïve, ingenuous. This was a different Joan Jordan than the girl he had met that afternoon. He wondered apprehensively if she still possessed her reason.

Without knowing or understanding, he realized the effect the change had wrought in her. She did not know she was naked—not in the sense she would have that afternoon. She was as innocently naked as Eve in the Garden before the Fall.

His feeling of shame for her went away. It was best to humor her. He smiled in the dark. She smiled in return. The moonlight glinted from tiny, sharp teeth, astrally brilliant against the blood-red of her lips. In spite of their sparkle, the blue eyes remained curiously blank.

Mulvaney found that he was no longer surprised at her being there, even though he did not know the motive of her presence. And he did not think it strange that her gleaming body cast no shadow in the moonlight. It was only a point he noticed in passing.

"You have no shadow," he remarked.

"Of course not. The moon is full."

"I had no shadow tonight in the lamplight," he continued.

"No. You wouldn't have. The moon is full and you are one of us."

The repetition irritated him.

"I always had a shadow before!"

"Things are different . . . in the Valley."

Mulvaney was beginning to believe that they were.

"I don't understand you at all," he said petulantly.

She threw back her golden head, and her slim, white body arched in the moonlight. Red lips parted breathlessly.

"Hurry! The full moon calls!"

He thought of his clothes on the chair across the room.

"My clothes—" he began.

The change in her—he could not define it. But he knew she would not understand about clothes.

"Come like this?" he asked feebly.

She sprang gracefully to her feet, eyes sparkling. She nodded eagerly, held out her hand to him.

Mulvaney would not have been astonished had she stepped out the window and floated lightly to the ground. He would have followed heroically after. She did nothing of the kind, however. She took his hand and led him down the stairs to the front door.

Then they were treading barefoot through soft grass, and he felt the caress of the nightwind on his body.

"Pinch me," Mulvaney said. "I want to know if I'm dreaming!"

Joan Jordan—the *new* Joan Jordan—laughed up into his questioning face. She sobered quickly.

"Tell me, Kenneth—how did your parents—die?"

He frowned and remained stubbornly silent.

"I'm so tired of the Valley, Kenneth. I plan to leave it soon. It may some day save *my* life to know."

She *was* mad. He could no longer doubt it. What had he let himself in for? Suppose the fierce inhabitants of the town should find them naked together like this? He thought of horsewhips and rails and feathers and tarpots.

NONE the less, some of the girl's ecstatic exuberance flowed into him. Abandonment began to throb in his veins. The accident suffered by his parents so long ago seemed somehow less personal than it had.

"I was only six when it happened. They went swimming—and drowned."

"Oh." She sounded disappointed. "Is that all?"

"No. We lived on a farm. A neighbor lost some of his stock. Wolves, he said. He'd seen them crossing the irrigation ditch between our two places. My folks always enjoyed swimming in the ditch on moonlight nights—" He halted and looked at her suspiciously.

"Go on," she breathed.

"They went out one night to swim. They didn't come back. Our neighbor found them next morning—drowned in the ditch."

"But how? Not both. It couldn't just happen."

"No. Our neighbor had secretly set traps under the water for the wolves he claimed to have seen crossing there."

"Oh!" Horror throbbed in the cry. Then, "The wolves—did they ever come to his farm again?"

"I don't know. I was sent away to an orphanage."

Her white forehead wrinkled.

"Sometimes the ranchers around here set wolf-traps. But never under water. That's—too cruel!"

Perhaps Mulvaney was beginning to guess the truth. Perhaps he preferred to believe that both of them were delightfully mad. Thought of the truth was so devastating. And worse than madness. For the moment, he was content to reject the thoughts that pounded at his brain. There was a primal joy to trotting across the soft pasture in the moonlight, the thrillingly naked girl at his side.

The moon was reflected in silver spangles from the dark, massed leaves of the cottonwoods along the creek. They paused in the shadows, where the bank dipped down to the cool dark waters.

The girl put both hands on his chest, forcing him to sit. Her vibrant young body was trembling with eagerness.

"Don't move," she whispered. "Watch me!"

A stray shaft of moonlight flashed upon her marble skin. She dipped into the creek, rolled over in the shallow water, flanks gleaming. He could see the water foam, and the girl's body struggling; then she pawed toward shore. Emerging, it was

not Joan Jordan, but a huge dog-like beast, white-furred from slim muzzle to graceful haunches. A wolf!

Mulvaney started to get up, a cry rising in his throat. The white wolf whipped around and plunged into the creek. Joan Jordan emerged, naked and dripping.

The breath whistled out of Mulvaney's lungs. Bad night. Seeing things. The girl touched his bare shoulder with a cool, wet hand.

"You see? Now you do it!"

She pulled him to his feet, pushed him to the water's edge. Mulvaney's senses swam. It was out of all reason. He wanted to back away and run. Then he saw Joan naked in the stream, dark water gurgling about white thighs. He plunged forward.

The white wolf galloped out on the bank. Kenneth Mulvaney pawed after her. He found footing in the mud, lunged toward shore.

A thousand scents he had never known before swarmed upon his consciousness. The night was bright with a new acuteness of vision. He threw back his head to laugh aloud in sheer joy of living. Sleek, gray muzzle lifted to the moon, and Kenneth Mulvaney howled as a wolf howls, fiercely, savagely, with the eternal sorrow and loneliness of the wolf-kind.

Then he romped with the white she-wolf. The sky was a field of blazing gems, the earth a garden of Paradise. But she quickly ended their play.

"We don't run alone here. The others are waiting. Bock will be angry."

Mulvaney trotted obediently at her flank. He wanted to stay and romp, but Bock Martin said the pack must run together.

"It was different before Bock came," the she-wolf told him. "We hunted deer in the mountains. Bock came from the Outside. He made himself our leader. He insists we attack cattle—and men!"

"Men have guns," he said, bringing the thought into his wolf-brain with a vicious tug.

"We don't fear guns, Kenneth. Only silver. Silver kills our kind. Men know that. When they realize what we are, they can arm against us. That is our danger from men. Another is the day. Never let dawn find you in wolf-form."

The she-wolf quickened her pace. On the other side of a low mound, they found the wolf-pack waiting. Mulvaney stood atop the knoll, strong wolf-legs braced, gray-furred ears cocked forward, and received their voiceless greeting.

A great black wolf rose crouching from the midst of the pack and slunk forward, belly hugging the ground. Despite the change in form, Mulvaney knew that this black beast was Bock Martin. The hackles lifted on his sturdy shoulders, and he growled ominously.

"Don't!" the she-wolf whispered. "It's Bock!"

The slinking black wolf glided nearer. Mulvaney crouched, heaving loins pressed against the cool earth. The gray-furred muzzle wrinkled hatefully. Deadly fangs glinted in the moonlight.

BOCK MARTIN was evil. Mulvaney sensed that now as he never had before. Had he been older and wiser in the ways of the wolf-men, Bock Martin would not have mattered. But Kenneth Mulvaney had never committed an evil in his life. It was through no fault of his he was one of the were-people. The training of his years in the orphanage was strong within him.

With hate-filled eyes and the promise of death in his snarling jaws, he awaited the sneaking advance of the sable hound of Hell.

Mulvaney had the advantage of height. When he saw the beast crouching and trembling for the leap, he launched his body forward. The wolf-people stood by

in silent fear as the flashing, gray-furred shape streaked upon its enemy.

Mulvaney's mind was the mind of a wolf. He was not afraid. The hot blood pounded fiercely in his veins. He was a new wolf—a young wolf. He had strength and advantage. Cunning did not matter.

Snapping, snarling, growling hideously, the black and the gray threshed down the slope. The two were a tangle of legs and muzzles, of bushy tails and hard, whip-cord muscles.

They fought as wolves fight—fang to fang and claw to claw. Rage and murderous hate flamed in Mulvaney's wolf-brain. His man-brain looked askance, observed what he did, and approved.

The night was made fearful with their hate. Their snarling rage struck silence and terror to the tiny denizens of the field. The moon and the stars looked on impassively.

Mulvaney sought with murderous fangs the throbbing jugular of his enemy. His jaws ached for the feel of thick, hot blood spilling over them. Gnashing teeth bit into the black wolf's tender gorge. The beast panted frenziedly, clawed at Mulvaney's ribs and flanks. The gray wolf sank its fangs deeper into hot flesh—and then he went spinning bewilderedly end-over-end, to land crashing a dozen yards away.

The were-people whimpered. A voice croaked hysterically.

"The Master! The Master!"

Confused with shock, bruised and gasping, the wolf-shape of Kenneth Mulvaney drew trembling legs under itself. The solid earth seemed to roll maddeningly, and he whined with pain. The thunderous symphony pounding in his brain receded and grew faint. He lifted his muzzle and scented fiercely for the black wolf.

A biting, acrid odor dug at his sensitive nostrils—the reek of glowing sulphur. And then he saw the Shape!

It was cloaked with the Blackness and the Stink of the Pit, evil of eye and visage, black, grim, utterly hideous. The hair rose on the gray wolf's back. A snarl gnarled deep in the panting chest. Purplish lightnings flickered in the gloom that clothed the hateful Shape.

The Demon's silence was its most utter terror. Mulvaney struggled against the fear that ate at his heart. The Monster spoke. The solitude resounded with the whiplash of its voice.

"Neither man nor were-beast can destroy me, Kenneth Mulvaney! I have tested you and found you strong. Strength be in the evil you shall do for me! In my stead, from now on you shall lead the pack—and shall render unto me these souls, one by one as death shall claim them. It was for this purpose I sent the call of the Valley into your being where you roamed Outside and did not know yourself!"

The gray wolf snarled its hatred.

"HATE is my strength," the Prince of Evil derided him. "All my loyal subjects hate me. They serve me well, nonetheless. But remember—I hold your souls in bondage. When you shall die, they shall be rendered unto me and my Kingdom of the Damned!

"This is your portion—of you who are the descendants of the witch-folk of eld. Through the years, I have gathered this band together in my Valley, to increase and become strong—to battle the race of men for supremacy.

"The ancient practices shall return. The ancient laws shall be in order. Not in this century nor in the next. But by and by. Eternity is not too long to wait for my vengeance!"

The Shape fell silent, a brooding, awful silhouette against the sleeping wolf of a stone mountain that jutted into the star spangled sky at the head of the Valley. The sooty lips moved again.

"Now, Kenneth Mulvaney, begone with your shadowless curs! You've work to do tonight!"

Whimpering with fright, the pack broke and fled. No less defiant, the grim gray wolf retreated down the slope. And with him cowered the white she-wolf.

When Mulvaney looked again, the Shape had disappeared. The night was clear and cool. From far away, his furry ears caught the tinkle of water splashing in the creek.

He understood now. He knew he was a were-wolf descended of were-wolves. The circumstance of his parents' death was no longer a mystery. Nor was the soulless look in his eyes and in those of these others without explanation—nor the lack of shadows to follow them. They were all of the same tribe—they all bore the taint of Evil.

The thought was a hateful one. What unholy pact with Satan had made this possible? Through how many misty aeons of time had it continued in force? Whose dark deeds and hellish desires had brought about this unwilling bondage upon generations unborn?

These were questions Mulvaney might never answer. The truth was sealed with the silence of Time. He knew instinctively that the were-beast glorified in its unclean condition. Some strain of the human in him found it repulsive. He would find a way to deliver them of their detestable slavery.

But how? Could they return to the state of men and defeat the purpose of the Beast by refusing to serve? The thought was a vain one. The pack had gathered around him, and the moon shone pitilessly down. The ground under each heaving belly was bright with its glow. The were-folk had no shadows—and no souls.

"Tonight we drink—or we die," spoke a grizzled old wolf. "Can you lead us to fresh blood, Kenneth Mulvaney?"

Mulvaney was aware of the thirst that had begun to torment his own throat. The moon had passed the zenith and time was short. They must make the kill before dawn; it was their portion—their Fate.

The problem confronting Mulvaney could not be solved before they had fed—as feed they must. Into his wolf-brain crept an image of the cattle that had grazed contentedly in the fields. But they belonged to the villagers. It was senseless to kill them and rob themselves.

The gray wolf threw back its head, muzzle to the moon, and howled. The keening cry released hot excitement into his feverish veins. The blood of the witch-folk of old Ireland awoke in him, exultant and maddening. He departed toward the nearest pine-clad slope at a swift, easy lope.

At his flank ran the white she-wolf, fierce joy and pride blazing in her eyes. Behind them streamed the wolf-pack, silent as shadows, shadowless as they sped.

THE cowboy on the paint pony halted at the edge of the sleeping herd and rolled a cigarette. His companion was a somber shadow in the moonglow.

"Fust time ridin' night range ever gave me the willies," he growled. "How 'bout you, Larry?"

Larry shrugged, tilted back his sombrero and applied a match flame to the twisted end of his cigarette.

"Dunno, Joe. You're a nervous type." He inhaled vigorously. The glowing tip of the cigarette lighted his lean face with a ruddy flare.

Joe's horse moved restively, swaying the man in the saddle.

"A funny business," he said.

"Yeah." Larry pondered the situation. "The old man and the *padre* has got their heads together. Maybe the *padre's* right—I dunno."

"In which case," opined Joe gloomily,

"we oughta be allowed to shoot. If'n they come at all."

"The *padre* claims they're bound to. Full moon, he says." Larry reflected on the words he had heard from Father d'Arcy. "Here's what he said. There was a were-wolf—like one o' these—raidin' a village up in Canada where he had a parish. They tracked it down an' shot it with a silver bullet. Turned out to be the town's leadin' banker. Seems like the critters turn back to their human shape when they're kilt."

"Were-wolves!" Joe snorted. "Mangy ol' timber wolves, *I* says! Didn't I see 'em streakin' for the woods las' winter after they'd got into the stock-corrals an' chewed up thirty head o' fine steer beef?"

"I ain't passin' no opinions," Larry returned calmly. "I'm tellin' you what the *padre* says. Mebbe he's right an' mebbe he ain't! We ain't to shoot, anyway—'less they attack us. In which case, we got silver in our guns."

"I know," Joe growled distrustfully. "We're just to douse 'em with this water the *padre* blessed." He patted the moist flank of a water-bag slung to his saddle-horn.

"That's how it is," Larry agreed. "Chase 'em back, the *padre* says. Only back to where, he didn't say. The old man backs him up. Guess they're figgerin' something they don't want ever'body to know about."

He tossed the end of his cigarette upon the hoof-churned earth and wheeled his pony.

"Keep a sharp eye, Joe. S'long."

The paint pony circled slowly back, while the rider sang softly to lull the herd.

THERE was nothing human in the spirit of Kenneth Mulvaney as he loped across the timbered ridges with the white she-wolf at his side. The silence was a tonic to him. The keen scent of pine-balsam mingling with the dank odor of rotting mould tingled in his flaring nostrils. He ran with lean muzzle thrust eagerly forward, the scent of hot blood a maddening urge.

A small creature of the forest sensed the coming of the ghost-wolves. It cocked tiny ears, eyes bright with fear. The gray wolf sprang. Great jaws crunched on tender flesh and fragile bone. The wolf took its first taste of blood, while the white-furred she danced eagerly and licked at his scarlet muzzle with impatient tongue.

Hunger inspired of Hell drove him on. The scent of cattle in the draw tingled in his nostrils.

The wolf-pack skulked at the edge of the forest, wormed through tall grass, plunged snarling among the sleeping herd.

The frightened beasts leaped erect. Hooves churned the earth, horns tossed against the sky. Dust rose in a cloud to obscure the moon.

Fierce, primal joy flooded Mulvaney's senses, and he made the kill with his white-furred mate leaping at his side.

A man's voice shouting brought him with a snarl from the unholy feast. He crouched, ready to spring, eyes blazing at the horse and rider bearing down upon him.

The rider passed, horse's hooves thundering, and slashed at the water-bag slung to the pommel of his saddle. In midspring, Kenneth Mulvaney felt the gush of the fluid in his face. Burning rivulets seared down his forelegs.

Eau bénite! Powerful muscles sent him tumbling from the menace of the water the priest had blessed. He fled to the forest and rolled in the cool earth to soothe the agony of his burns. Then he streaked for home.

Full-fed, the pack loped through the forest behind him. At his flank, the white she-wolf whimpered in sympathy of his pain.

The pain had cleared the hellish blood-

lust from Mulvaney's brain. He calculated coldly, returned to his original problem. There must be a way!

He thought of exorcism and rejected it. They would need the services of the priest at Lastwater. But he wouldn't do. The presence of holy water showed his hand behind the readiness of the ranchers. Mulvaney could not know the futility of exorcism as Father d'Arcy understood it. The priest had another thought in mind.

The moon sunk low in the west while they ran. The day would break before long.

At the edge of the timber ringing their own valley, the gray wolf halted the pack and scented the breeze. The gray-furred muzzle twitched at the hateful odor cloying the air. It was the smell of men—men between the pack and the water they must gain before dawn!

IT HAD been clever of the ranchers to enter the valley while its people were gone. For a long time they had waited in the shadow of the cottonwoods. At Sam Carver's back, the dark waters of Were Creek gurgled musically. In front of him, the westward slanting rays of the moon shed a dim radiance over the silent fields of Were Valley. The lanky man at his side uttered a low-voiced curse.

"What's eatin' you, Slim?"

"Damned if I know, boss," replied the man who used to trap wolves for the bounty. "'Spect it's ants!"

He backed cautiously out of the undergrowth and lay down a yard farther away.

"We have to wait all night?" he complained.

"The *padre* says they'll come back before dawn."

"How do we know they will?"

"Reckon the *padre's* about right, don't you? We find the whole damn town deserted. It's enough to give you the creeps!"

"If it's so certain they was goin' to attack the herd tonight, why didn't we trap 'em there?"

"It's a problem we got to solve all at once, Slim. Most of 'em would have got away. This way, we've got 'em all. They have to reach this creek before sunup. It's the only water for miles around."

He peered sharply at the somber forest on the slope. Slim started to move again.

"Hold it, Slim!"

The lanky cowboy wriggled closer, shoving the muzzle of his rifle into the clear.

"What's up?"

"There—at the edge o' the timber! See anything?"

Slim peered earnestly through the baffling light.

"There—somethin' white moving in the woods!"

Slim cursed softly.

"Them's wolves, old-timer!"

He readied his piece. Carver restrained him with a hand on his arm.

"Wait'll they get in the clear. It's nearly mornin' an' they're desperate for the water. We can wait."

The slim cowboy relaxed and made a sound like a sleepy owl. Another owl answered from upstream, and one from lower in the valley.

"The boys are ready, boss."

"All right. Give 'em the signal to fire when I say so."

The old rancher stared hard at the fleeting shapes that skulked at the forest's edge. The wolves appeared to be nervous and restless. A blot detached itself from the shadow of the woods and trotted a few yards into the open. A white shape joined it, and the two stood sniffing.

"Damn!" growled the rancher. "They've got our scent!"

One by one, the wolves began to leave the shelter of the timber. There seemed to be hundreds of them to the breathlessly waiting ranchers. The mass moved cautiously down the grassy slope.

Carver put a hand into his shirt and brought out a mirror. Briefly the glass caught the gleam of the moon.

"What's that fer?" whispered his companion.

Carver tilted the glass toward the approaching pack, craned his neck to peer into it. He had a difficult time registering the image, but he saw finally. He passed the mirror to the cowboy with a trembling hand.

"You look," he commanded gruffly.

The cowboy held the mirror in position and peered into it. He jerked it back swiftly.

"God!"

"You see?"

"Them ain't wolves—they're people!"

"The *padre's* right, Slim."

"I look at 'em and I see wolves. How come the mirror shows people out there?"

Carver shrugged and his mouth drooped bitterly.

"I don't know. It's somethin' to do with the silver on the glass. The *padre* can explain it maybe. I can't."

He watched the wolf-pack fixedly. He was hesitant, reluctant to give the next order.

"They're gettin' set to attack us," he observed. "They can't know we got a hundred and fifty men here. They ain't got a chance. Give 'em the signal, Slim."

The cowboy's face was a pale blur in the gloom.

"You—you can't, boss! It's murder!"

"It's them or us. They wouldn't hesitate to tear *your* throat out. Come on with the signal."

SLIM hooted twice like an owl. Carver's rifle cracked immediately and lashed an orange tongue into the gloom. Rifle-fire rippled through the cottonwoods, like a fierce flame devouring a forest of dry twigs.

The great white wolf at the head of the pack leaped convulsively, fell sprawled and kicking. Silver death whined through the night, and lean gray shapes died with the thunder of gunfire in their ears.

The mass of wolves halted fleetingly, spun and fled for the timber. The hateful fire raked them again and again. Dozens fell, twitched and lay still. Half the pack succeeded in melting safely into the shadows. The firing came to a ragged end.

"Some of 'em got away," Slim said.

Carver got to his feet.

"They'll be back."

The moon shining through a rift in the foliage lighted his face wanly. His eyes stared darkly and his mouth was twisted in sickish lines.

"Can't get over the fact they're human . . . in a way."

He parted the brush and stepped into the clear.

"Where yuh goin', boss?"

The rancher's white head looked frosty in the moonlight. The gloom made a huge, formless bulk of his body. He went forward across the field, lighting the way with a small pocket torch. Hesitating, Slim crawled out of the brush and followed. Behind them, the cottonwoods murmured with the voices of the ranchers.

Sam Carver knelt at the side of the first form huddled in the long grass. The lamp played across the naked white body of the girl who lay with her golden head cradled upon her arm. Her face was hidden in the pool of shadow cast by her own body. A crimson wetness gleamed on the smooth round of her breast. Carver snapped off the light and stood erect. The moon made molten silver of the dead girl's body.

"Poor, damn kid!" he said softly.

The lanky cowboy sighed hoarsely.

"It's murder! We've done murder!"

The old rancher placed a hand on his shoulder.

"'Tain't murder, son. See—when I put the light on her—" The flash glowed

briefly. "She casts a shadow. They was lost souls—an' lost souls ain't got no shadows. The *padre* knows these things. The silver bullets kill them—an' give them back their souls. I dunno how, but the *padre* ought to know. He's a man o' God."

"I never believed in souls," Slim said hollowly.

Sam Carver shook his head slowly. "Never took much truck in 'em myself—'til now. Guess people ain't as smart as they think they are, Slim. Lots o' things we don't know—an' lots o' things we do know an' won't believe."

The old man brooded in the moonlight, a somber shadow towering over the dead girl. Then he turned and shuffled with his companion toward the shelter of the cottonwoods.

Three yards from the pitifully naked body, eyes glowed in the deep grass. A lean, gray wolf wriggled forward on its belly. The beast's jaws quivered. From between them, the pink tongue reached slowly forth and licked tenderly at the still warm cheek of the dead girl. The faint breeze stirred in her golden curls, and the gray wolf turned away. He drew his legs under him and sprang swiftly up the slope.

"There goes one! Git 'im!"

Rifles spat a ragged volley. Silver slugs whined and crackled around the fleeing wolf. The prodigal waste of precious metal was a sign of the ranchers' determination.

THE were-beast reached the shadows in safety and skulked there, looking down upon the valley. The human eyes showed grief and sorrow, but no hate or fear. The creek and its cottonwoods was a black snake wriggling the length of the valley. Men hid in the cottonwoods—men with silver death in their guns.

In the west the moon hung low. The starshine had begun to pale in the east. So, little time was left.

He turned and trotted up the slope, among the whispering pines.

The clan had gathered on the ridge. Above lay only gloomy rocks and barrenness. The ranchers waited below. The gray wolf moved silently among the pack. They were afraid, and he knew it.

Picking his way carefully, the gray wolf moved to a spot above them, atop a gaunt, ill-shaped boulder leaning out of the mountainside. In black silhouette against the milky dawn, he lifted his muzzle to the jewel-spattered velvet of the sky. He howled as a wolf howls, savagely, mournfully, with desperate loneliness and grief. One by one, the pack took up the cry and gave voice to their own requiem.

The men in the valley shuddered at the hideous sound that floated down from the ridge upon the chill breath of dawn. Some crossed themselves. Others cursed under their breath.

The wolf looked with glowing eyes upon the remainder of his people. He would lead them. He would lead them into the deliverance he had promised himself they should have. The words of Sam Carver had shown him the way.

The moon slipped behind the shoulder of the mountain that was like a great, sleeping wolf set to guard the valley. The shadow of it cut ominous and menacing across timbered slopes and grassy prairies. The chill of dawn fingered into the cottonwoods.

Like shadows came the wolves, streaming down the slope. The sky in the east grew whiter and whiter still. In the heart of the gray wolf was calmness and peace. His people followed him into the face of death by silver. And it freed them of Satan's bondage.

Death Has Red Hair

By GREYE LA SPINA

WE THREE men were hugging the open fire closely. The raw chill of that November night had closed in around us and the blazing logs yielded grateful warmth.

Peter Murray was leaning forward in his chair, looking absent-mindedly into the leaping flames that sent flickering shadows to dancing on the walls behind us. Hank Walters was staring at Peter and I was

There was something absolutely extraordinary about her hair. It was as if—as if it were alive . . . as though every strand was the darting flame of a glowing torch!

watching both my guests with curious speculation that had risen in me since that afternoon's encounter.

I could have sworn that Hank's black eyes held an expression at once envious and inimical as he bent his gaze dourly on Peter's handsome, perplexed young face. I was both dismayed and sorry, for the older man possessed a weapon that might cut the brightness out of Peter's life; Magda Farrar was his foster-daughter and his ward, and to young Peter she symbolized and embodied everything desirable in life.

"Come out of it, you two," growled I, irritated and uneasy at their silence. "This is a shooting party, not a wake."

Peter's bright blue eyes turned from the fire. He met my gaze and chuckled.

Hank's lowering face followed the younger man's movement, then suddenly shifted uneasily. He must have noticed that I was observing his unguarded expression for his mouth compressed tightly for a moment before he spoke.

"Hell of a party," said Hank distinctly, "when a man can't chuck a pretty girl under the chin without having a fool youngster butt into his fun."

It was out now. I regarded him with hidden dismay. The underlying currents of hidden emotion had forced their way to the surface and could no longer be tacitly ignored. I was furious at Hank for his lack of restraint.

More than that, I had been—still was—just as disgusted at his behavior that afternoon as had been Peter. Being older than either of my two guests, I had, possibly, learned to be diplomatic; sufficiently so, at least, not to have thrust myself unnecessarily into a situation *à deux* where my tactful absence would have been better appreciated than my presence. I had seen nothing, after all, but Peter's restraining hand on Hank's restive shoulder, and the disappearing swirl of a girl's abbreviated skirts and long cloak into a part of the woods where the low undergrowth was not yet entirely denuded of foliage. All I had heard had been Hank's exclamation, coming almost directly upon the girl's scream. Peter must have been quick in his reaction.

"Take your hand off me, you damned young cub!" had shouted Hank, with uncontrolled passion for which I did not at the moment entirely blame him. No man relishes the admonishing restraint of a youngster, in front of a woman particularly, no matter how much he may have deserved it.

Knowing Hank's proclivities, I could reconstruct the scene fairly well. He must have come upon the girl before she realized his proximity, and mischievously pulled off her pointed cap with the tassel that hung to her shoulder, confidently relying upon his vaunted masculine charm to smooth over the situation if it should unexpectedly tend toward the unpleasant.

The girl had sprung to her feet, snatched for her cap, which Hank had thrust tormentingly behind him. Whereupon she had let out that eldritch scream. And the scream brought Knight-Errant Peter tearing out of the woods behind them, to remonstrate with Hank, who had naturally resented the interference. The girl had taken advantage of Hank's momentary unguardedness to snatch, vainly, for her pointed cap, then had fled incontinently without it.

With dismayed astonishment I had heard her scream, for it was not a scream of surprise; it was a cry of pure anger, of such depth and intensity that it started shivers running up and down my backbone. It was almost un-human in its expression of thwarted fury; arousing in me a powerful curiosity to see this girl who was so capable of such a strength of emotion. At the same time, I felt a dread of seeing her, as if she might prove to be

more than my old eyes would care to take in.

PETER told me, as we walked some distance behind Hank on our way back to my little shooting-lodge (Hank strode ahead of us with a thunderous, black countenance, a pointed, tasselled stockinette cap dangling from one hand) that the girl was—

"Well, Judge, extraordinary, if you get what I mean."

"Can't say that I do, Peter. Now, if you were telling me that Magda Farrar was extraordinary," I suggested, smiling, but Peter shook his blond head impatiently.

"Magda is—well, Magda," he explained carefully but unconvincingly. "Now, this girl was—well—say, Judge, do you remember that Hans Christian Anderson story about the erl-king's daughters, who were beautiful before, but hollow, seen from behind?"

"That girl's scream didn't ring hollow, Peter," I bantered.

His blue eyes blazed with earnest fire.

"Judge Holley, she made me remember those elf-princesses. There was a—a something," he tried to tell me lamely, "about her eyes, and her whole expression—elfish, unearthly — that wasn't — well, that wasn't—"

"I can see that this wood nymph has made a strong impression upon *you*, my boy. As for a hollow back, Peter—?"

"Her long cloak completely enveloped her, Judge. As for any impression, what I got wasn't pleasant. You see, she was absolutely white with fury at Walters and when she let out that scream—" Peter actually shuddered at the mere remembrance of it, "—I felt sick."

"H-m-m, I confess it struck me that way, too, Peter," I conceded. "Very strong personality, that young woman's," I mused thoughtfully.

"Walters had no business to snatch off a strange girl's cap," Peter criticized as he swung along beside me.

"Walters has a weakness toward all femininity, Peter," I murmured deprecatorily. (Who could know my own law-partner as well as I?) "He means no harm. Just his little failing, my boy."

"Just his failing?" repeated Peter sharply. "It was his little failing that tortured and killed Magda's mother."

I could not deny that; everybody knew that Hank's peccadillos on the primrose path had disillusioned and, yes, had broken Edith Farrar-Walter's heart. She had literally died of a broken heart, induced by the crash of her house of dreams. Her own physician had told me—but that is another story.

"Still you had no business interfering, Peter," I said gravely. "Hank is an older man than you. Also, he is Magda's guardian."

That last touched Peter, who started as if this thought with its attendant inferences came to him for the first time.

After a moment's silence he declared stubbornly, "Just the same he had no right to pull off that girl's cap and keep it from her. A perfect stranger. . . . Judge, I have a feeling that she won't let the matter drop; she'll get back at him."

"Poppycock!" laughed I. "Then I suppose that's her cap he's swinging at us like a red rag at a bull?" quoth I, amused.

Peter nodded.

"Judge, that girl had the most marvelous red hair I've ever seen in all my life. It almost wasn't real. Why, it was like a mass of curling flames that tumbled, blazing, upon her shoulders when Walters pulled her pointed cap off. And do you know, it struck me that what made her furious was because he'd uncovered her wonderful hair and she couldn't tuck it out of sight again."

"Perhaps she was mortified at wearing it

long when everybody else has shingled theirs?" I suggested, too smartly perhaps, for Peter bestowed upon me a long look of acute scorn.

"There was something absolutely extraordinary about that girl's hair," he repeated inanely.

"You've said that before, Peter," I reminded him dryly.

"Extraordinary. You know, not—not quite normal," Peter seemed to be analyzing his sensations. "As if—as if it was all alive in every strand. Why, when he pulled off her cap it was like uncovering the darting flame of a glowing torch."

"Very poetic, Peter. I wonder how Magda would relish such absorbed interest in this strange young woman's Titian locks?"

"Magda's human," retorted Peter strangely. "Now, this girl—"

And he began going over it again, as if he couldn't let the subject rest. And in that fashion we had tramped along behind Hank, who strode blackly ahead of us, actually, in his preoccupation, slamming the lodge door shut in our faces when he'd entered.

And now, after a couple of hours' stewing and simmering of their emotions, Hank—the older man, who should have been the one to control himself—burst out incontinently.

"Hell of a fine party," said he again, and shot at Peter such a look—

That look made me feel a bit sickish with apprehension, for I knew Hank capable of meannesses when he'd lost control of himself. It was only his unusual intuitions along legal lines that had constrained me to continue in partnership with him after Edith's sad death, Edith whom Peter and I both loved.

"Sorry, Walters," Peter began to apologize manfully. "But the girl—"

"To hell with the girl!" snarled Hank, tensing his crouched figure with the suggestiveness of a huge wild beast about to make its spring.

That Peter saw this movement and interpreted it clearly I realized when the boy got to his feet with a lithe, guarded movement, and stood in a position of vantage, looking down upon us both as we sat before the smoldering logs on the rude stone hearth.

"I said I was sorry," repeated the boy with gravity. "I was taken off my guard by the girl's scream. I rather thought she—"

"You'd no business thinking anything about her," growled Hank, and his nostrils dilated, then pinched whitely.

I KNOW the signs. I'd seen him once, when in a cold fury of anger against an unfortunate stenographer at whom he had not dared bluster in my presence, he thrust his black countenance down into hers until she had shrunk back speechless, every drop of blood fled from her pallid and terrified face; there had been something infinitely worse about that silent thrust of his thunderous gaze into her intimate nearness than a dozen bellowed curses. So now he looked up at Peter, and I knew that back of that concentrated fury Hank's mind was working with the alert subtlety of a writhing cobra insinuating itself into the right position to strike. I began to tell myself that it was better to lose money than continue our law partnership much longer; Hank's faults had increased enormously since Edith's death.

Peter disregarded the signs, not knowing Hank as I did. He knew, of course, that Hank was boiling over with repressed emotion, with hate and fury, but Peter could not believe even what he knew, for to his ingenuous nature there had been no sound reason for such an ebulition of uncontrolled frenzy.

"She didn't like it when you uncovered her hair," Peter explained, with that

straightforward simplicity that sometimes makes me despair, while simultaneously admiring him.

"Who says she didn't like it? You damned young meddling cub, what do *you* know about women?" It was a shout by this time, and Hank now stood beside his chair.

"You don't know anything about women!" he bellowed, thrusting that face, dark with fury, at Peter, who involuntarily took a step backward, astonished. It was, obviously, Peter's first experience with Hank in a full-grown rage. "To prove what I say, I warn you now that when we get back to town Magda, who you think is in love with your yellow hair and blue eyes, will drop you like hot cakes, you young fool."

Peter's face wore the hurt look of a dumb animal which suffers your blows but refrains from striking back in its own way, because it is, after all, constituted along some lines of finer stuff than revengeful human nature can always boast. I saw that he blinked hard once or twice. When he spoke it was in such a gentle voice that I, in turn, blinked rapidly, for it did not sound like the healthily self-confident voice of youth.

"I don't think it's just—well—fair to Magda, to bring her into this, Walters," said Peter in that low, almost ingratiating voice. "Really, we were discussing—"

"I'm telling you that you think you know women, and imagine her in love with you. You don't know a damn about any woman, least of all my ward. I can twist her around my finger, I tell you, and when we get back to the city I'll see to it that you get your congé so swiftly—" Walters left off, chuckling saturninely to himself, but his loose lips curled with cruelty and his narrowed black eyes never left off that fixed stare at Peter's young blond manliness.

Peter, however, slowly turned his stricken gaze to me. I know then that this young blond Apollo was so lacking in the usual masculine conceit that he actually could not believe himself sufficiently attractive, sufficiently worth-while, to hold the beloved woman's loyalty. And no allowance was being made, apparently, for Magda's personal ideas on the subject. It was so astonishing, and to my keen sense of humor so absurd, that I must have failed to demonstrate in my expression the sympathy or the encouragement that Peter had been expecting from me.

Hank blustered on, triumphantly.

"That girl, you young fool, would have been in my arms in another minute if you hadn't come butting into what was none of your business. I know how to handle women, I tell you. They like to be treated rough," shouted he, and burst into a guffaw that had a content of insult for Peter.

I saw that the boy colored. I knew how tenderly reverent were his thoughts about his sweetheart, for once in awhile he had dropped a chance remark that made me love him for his fineness. Hank had dug in, deeply, when he made that final observation.

"That girl—" all at once cried out Peter, as if he could not contain himself, "that girl would have killed you if she'd had a knife or pistol handy, when you tore away her cap and tumbled her glorious hair down over her shoulders. Didn't you see how she tried to push it together and cover it with her hands?"

For a moment my partner's dark mood lightened. A reminiscent smile flickered about his loose lips, drawing them into an expression of complacent irony.

"Kill me, would she? Perhaps—but with kisses, fool."

"Lord!" Peter jerked out, in the throes of such sick disgust that he actually drew up his shoulders, nauseated at that revelation of Hank's character.

His fury turned aside momentarily,

Hank uttered an immoderate laugh, apparently at his own thoughts. Then he said to Peter, sudden chill descending into his words and manner: "At all events, young man, don't come hanging around my ward any more. I won't have it. Just don't like you, that's all."

AT THE look of sly triumph on his face I began to consider again that clause in our articles of partnership which might be utilized in dissolving the business tie that bound us together, for down underneath I knew lay the direct will to hurt Peter Murray, and I feared that Magda—so slight and gentle and timid—would be wax in those cruelly clever hands, for Hank would stop at nothing.

Peter's face, puzzled for a moment at this direct attack, grew slowly white.

"You're rather unreasonable, Walters," said he, disturbed. "Miss Farrar and I are engaged, and I asked you not to bring her name into this disgustedly silly affair. Whatever your opinion of me, I wish you would honor that request, at least."

"Somebody ought to teach you your manners toward your betters," snarled Hank. His hands were shutting and opening, and shutting again.

"Not my betters," disputed Peter quietly but with a spirit. "My elders, perhaps."

"I'd like to hide you for your insolence," roared my partner, and suddenly swung across in front of me with that heavy fist of his, which I caught just in the nick of time by flinging up my hand against his arm, so that the blow he had aimed at Peter went harmlessly into space. He recovered his balance with an effort, and wheeled about upon me, where I sat quietly alert.

"You may be my senior in the firm, Judge Wilcox," he cried out at me with pointed formality, "but that gives you no right to interfere in my personal affairs, any more than that young cub."

Peter exclaimed sharply, so that we both looked at him in astonishment.

"That girl!"

"Where?" whispered Hank, in a hoarse undertone.

"At that window. She was staring in at us—at you," Peter replied, his voice also sinking to a low murmur. "Lord, how her hair blazes, in the light from our file!"

"Didn't I tell you you knew nothing about women, you fool?" whipped out my partner, and smiled sneeringly at the younger man.

Peter looked at him, his brows a straight line above his narrowed eyes.

"She's followed me here," whispered Hank. His low, triumphant laugh trembled as if with suddenly aroused emotion. "Excuse me, gentlemen, if I meet the lady outside. I have a faint idea that she would prefer to see me alone," and he smirked at us, licking his thick, loose lips with unctuous anticipation.

I exchanged a quick look with Peter. The boy was very pale. Then he strode across the room and stood before the door.

"Don't go," said he, barring the way. "Don't, Walters. I tell you, that girl's got it in for you. That girl *hates* you."..

A great laugh. Hank's head flung back as it issued thunderously from his pulsing throat.

"Hates me? *Me?* You young whippersnapper, I give you my permission to follow us and find out for yourself how much she hates me."

With that, he plunged at a heavy sweater on a peg by the door, pushed Peter out of his way, and flung out into the chill November night, leaving us silent, staring, half sick, behind him.

"Shut that door, my boy. The night air is penetrating."

Peter obeyed, slowly. Then he came to the fireplace and stood looking down at me, his blue eyes veiled with some secret, disturbing thought.

"What's up, boy?"

"Judge, I'm—afraid."

Husky, fearless, Peter is, to use such a word.

"Of what, lad?"

"That strange girl," whispered Peter, and over the pallor of his perplexed young face a grayness stole. "I tell you, her hair—"

"Oh, it is the *girl* who troubles you? Nothing strange in that," I laughed. "And as for her hair, Peter?"

"I tell you, she isn't—she isn't—one of us," said Peter with that distaste for the unusual that most normal men display. "She isn't—well, *right*. The erl King's daughters," he muttered irrelevantly.

"Why should that disturb you, my boy? If she isn't, we'll have our deeply disappointed friend back again in a short time, and I think, perhaps, you'd better arrange to be asleep in bed when he comes in, to avoid any further quarreling."

He shook his blond head slowly. Then with a sudden ejaculation he snatched for his cap and thrust it down upon his head. He pulled down a lumber jacket and began hurriedly pushing his arms through the sleeves.

"Why, Peter! You're not going out?" I asked inanely. "See here, Peter, he's right when he says it's none of your business. And the girl followed him here."

"That girl means to hurt him if she can," whispered Peter, his blue eyes looking wild in the fire's smoldering flicker.

"Poppycock!" I retorted tartly, for I saw where Peter's mood was leading us both, and the fire looked and felt good to me, that cold night.

"Just the same, I'm going to follow him. He said I might, didn't he?"

"You know perfectly well he didn't mean it," I objected lamely.

"Are you coming or not?" demanded Peter. "I'd like to have you along, Judge," and in his anxiety he began helping me into my sheepskin coat with unnecessary enthusiasm.

IT CERTAINLY looked as if I were in for it, so I shrugged my shoulders, knocked out my pipe and tucked it into my pocket, got my cap from a peg and followed that frantic boy. He led me a chase for a few minutes, for of course there was no way to locate Hank or the girl as long as they kept quiet. They might have been lurking about the cabin. If they had gone, in which direction had they disappeared?

There was no sound of voices to guide me, but all at once Peter uttered a smothered cry, and his hand closed about my arm like an iron band. He jerked me right-about-face, and then I saw what he'd seen, a kind of flickering, glowing light, off in the woods ahead of us.

"That's her," said Peter ungrammatically, and his voice was actually trembling with some emotion I had neither time nor inclination to analyze at that moment.

"What do you mean, That's her?" I echoed.

"Judge, don't you understand? I mean, it's her *hair*."

At that, I did give way to laughter that surged upward, shaking my diaphragm uncontrollably.

"Peter," I choked, when I could at least get out a word, "the lady's Titian hair has certainly turned your head. It must be luminous, if that's it. Boy, boy, you are absurd."

"God!" groaned Peter. His hand closed tighter than ever about my arm. "Judge, it's so horrible that I can hardly believe it myself. "I—I daren't say it—now. Look! Look!"

That reddish luminosity was bobbing unevenly up and down, as if it came from a lamp borne upon the head of a person walking rapidly, swimmingly, across un-

even ground. It was apparent to me that the girl carried a lantern only half opened. Quite natural, for a young person wandering around the woods at night. Could it be possible, after all, that Hank Walters had good foundations for his belief in his attraction for women? It looked that way, for this strange young woman had evidently forgotten her momentary anger at his rudeness of the afternoon, and had actually come, like Diogenes, hunting for him with her lantern. It was ridiculous, and I really didn't like to believe that a girl could fall so easily for a man like Hank. Surely she wouldn't have gone to such lengths merely to retrieve her cap?

"God!" ejaculated Peter Murray again. And then: "Listen!" he warned me.

I stood motionless, hardly breathing, and then I heard Hank's voice, and the crashing of his heavy body pushing its way through tangled undergrowth and over dry, crackling, fallen limbs and sere autumn leaves.

"Yes—that's Hank," I whispered.

"I know. Listen!"

Like the modulated voice that speaks behind the wings at the theater, purporting to be momentarily speeding away, came these broken, breathless outbursts of speech:

"Wait, you little devil!"

A crash into the undergrowth.

"I'm coming right along, you red-headed beauty. Want your cap, don't you? Well, I'll give it to you—maybe—for a kiss."

Another crash.

"Where's that lantern of yours, girl? Hold it this way. I can't see a thing."

Much tumbling and noise. Puffing. Blowing.

"Struck a tree that time . . . a-a-a-r-r-r-r-gh."

A mighty impact it must have been to have jerked that grunt out of Hank's heavy body.

"I'll catch up with you yet! Where's that light? Turn it this way, you she-devil!"

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the dreary, ominous whistle of a wind that came leaping down from the northwest, bearing on its sweeping pinions a biting foretaste of winter. And then such a scream as I hope never again to hear in all my life, so freighted was it with horror and—something more—. Followed, while I was still numbed, a laugh as sharply tinkling as silver bells shaken together in a crystal globe.

"She's done it! I knew she would!" cried out Peter frantically, and that gripping hand of his began to draw me forward through the woods recklessly.

I was colliding as I went with trees and bushes that seemed to spring out of the ground to form obstacles to our mad onrush. Once I fell over a huge rock that almost appeared to have reared itself against us directly out of the bosom of Mother Earth.

"Are you mad?" I gasped, trying in vain to pull my arm from Peter's frenzied grip. "We'll both be killed, running like this in the dark among these trees and rocks."

"Idiot that I am!" shouted Peter in reply. "I forgot the flashlight. It's right here in my pocket."

He pulled it out, let go my arm and then turned it on. Blessed light! It was time we had it. I knew my face was bleeding where a dry branch had neatly skinned one cheek as we flashed past it, and I'd barked both shins; I rather imagined they were bleeding, too. Peter ran ahead after that, throwing the light of the torch here and there.

We had been going uphill gradually, and it dawned upon me all at once what had happened, for a ghastly kind of silence reigned, broken only by the wind's sullen whine and our own trampling feet among dried leaves and broken twigs.

Hank had been following the girl blindly, and her lantern had not been powerful enough to discover to them their peril. They had gone running, directly to the verge of the old quarry.

"Here! Here!" shouted Peter.

THE light from his torch shot across a wide space, all black below that brilliant beam.

It was a warning I received none too soon to save me from the fate that had befallen the two who had been running ahead of us. I caught desperately with one arm at a tree trunk and swung about it, just barely checking my momentum. As I swung, my eyes followed the beam of Peter's light, down—down—piercing the darkness below.

There was a huddled, motionless heap at the bottom of the quarry. I knew that would be Hank. Or what was left of Hank.

I knew, too, that Hank would never bellow curses again. How? I *knew*. Above him bent another figure that pulled at him now, turning him this way and that.

Glowing, shining, dulling the very light of the electric torch that was bent in a brilliant stream of radiance upon it, was another light that seemed a very flame, leaping with such fervency of life that it hurt the eyes to see. Believe me or not, I know what I saw, and it was the pulsing, living flame of the red hair piling about the head of that strange girl that put the electric light to shame. I cried out in amazement and, I confess, with a sudden access of shuddering dislike and fear. What hair!

"I told you!" cried out Peter, beside me, and where he had been fearful before, he became reckless now.

He pushed the torch into my free hand, for I was still clinging to the tree that had served to break my dashing momentum.

"Play it on him," he directed. "She—she won't like that. I'll manage to climb down somehow."

I could hear the scraping of his feet and the crumbling fall of pebbles as he climbed down into the quarry toward that gruesome two. Once I heard his exclamation as he slipped. In an access of anxiety for him, I swerved the torch to light his perilous way, and when I saw he needed it, held it upon him, but my eyes were drawn from him by the sudden spring upward into vivid, astounding brilliance, of that strange girl's leaping flames of red hair, as if they showed off more in the darkness than in the torch's light. It took me a moment to realize what that meant, and the torch trembled so in my hand that I almost let it slip into the quarry.

Who was this creature, whose flaming locks carried the leaping light of living fire? I found myself shuddering. . . .

And then Peter shouted from below, and I turned the light in the direction of his voice. He was leaning over Hank's body. Then he straightened up.

The girl had moved away and stood a little distance, silent. She, it would appear, had not been injured, and I stupidly wondered why not, and how she had managed to escape Hank's untimely fate. A moment later I was to know.

"He's dead," I heard Peter declare. He was not speaking to me, for there was stern accusation in his voice. "You did it. Why?"

Her finger pointed downward.

I played the torch light where she was pointing, and saw Peter stoop. He drew a long, sinuous thing from Hank's dead fingers, and not easily at that. The girl swooped upon him, snatched at it, and then all at once the quarry went black except for the light of the torch, centered there on Peter standing by the dead man.

It was as if somebody had put an extinguisher over a torch!

I heard a tinkling, penetrating ripple of

cool, hard laughter. Where the girl had been standing I discerned a faint glow as of a shaded lantern. This light suddenly rose upward like thistledown on the wind, but in a swift, straight movement. It was as if that shaded lantern had been fastened at the end of a rope and had been drawn steadily upward. It paused in mid-air, hanging motionless over the middle of the quarry. I felt a most uncomfortable qualm at that sight, and mentally refused to give entrance to the surmises that crowded upon my troubled mind.

Peter was shouting at me from below, a quaver in his voice that he managed to restrain just above the point where it might have sounded craven. My sympathy was with him, for I *felt* the way his voice *sounded*.

"For God's sake, Judge, don't drop that torch!" he was crying at me. "I'm coming up. We couldn't get him out of here in the dark." The torch shook in my trembling hand. It could not have been of much assistance to Peter in his climb up the side of the quarry.

The girl—had no lantern. She had come floating up out of that quarry as if she were lighter than thistledown on the night wind—and through the long pointed cap that enveloped her hair glowed the light from those uncanny locks of flaming red. I mean that. The light came from her hair. It burned and glowed from under the edges of her long tasselled cap, and blazed where it had escaped in occasional locks as if it were living flame. It was unearthly. I was thankful when Peter had scrambled to my side.

"She's gone?" he asked rather than stated.

I touched him and he looked and saw what I was seeing. I could feel his sturdy frame shuddering. And as we stared, she must have drawn the cap closer over her brows and tucked in those fiery, straying locks, for it was as if someone had pushed an extinguisher down upon a flaming torch. Only a faint glow remained, like decaying wood; even that drifted away from us at last, like sea spume in moonlight, driven by a summer zephyr. But I had seen her face in one flashing moment; distinctly. It was unlike the face of any mortal woman I had ever looked upon. Something unearthly—elfish!

Peter was right when he said: "Extraordinary!"

"I don't believe she means us any harm," he whispered as if he feared to be overheard. "I gave her back her cap, didn't I?" he murmured uncertainly. "But I say, Judge, let's light out of here!"

It may have seemed cowardly to go away, leaving the body of my dead partner at the bottom of the black quarry, but perhaps if you had seen what Peter and I saw, you would have run for comparative shelter just as fast as we ran through the wood to my cabin.

The November wind howled and tore at us as we fled, the electric torch lighting our way precariously. Yet we were glad enough that no other light showed itself in our path. All that was ever said between us about that girl, Peter said when we had reached our goal.

"Will-o'-the-wisp," he muttered thickly, breathing hard as he slammed the bolts of the cabin door firmly into place.

And then he went to work nailing blankets over both the windows, nor did I question his action.

Of course, we couldn't tell all our story to the coroner next day. We said that Hank Walters had followed a girl that night and had inadvertently fallen into the quarry in the dark and that we could not locate the girl. The coroner said it was clear enough. He even suggested that the girl might have pushed Hank. Peter and I—well, we knew there was no need to push Hank when he was following the Ignis Fatuus.

A Question of Etiquette

By ROBERT BLOCH

Cities always twinkle with little lights. Lights to ward off the great blackness of night; the blackness where the dead dwell—and the things that are not dead . . .

THE house was old, like all the rest of them on the block. The gate squeaked as I pushed it open. That was the only sound I heard. My shoes had stopped squeaking hours ago. Taking the census takes the squeak out of shoes very quickly.

I walked up the steps of the porch. I was tired of walking up steps. I rang the bell. I was tired of ringing the bell.

Feet sounded inside. I was tired of feet sounding inside.

Just the same, I braced myself.

"Here it comes," I thought. "Another nose!"

And I was particularly tired of counting noses.

You understand how it is. Walk all day. Ring doorbells. Lug a heavy portfolio under your arm. Ask the same stupid questions over and over again. And when you finish, you haven't sold anybody a vacuum cleaner. You haven't sold a Fuller brush, or even a package of shoe laces. All you get out of it is four cents a nose, taking the census. There's no chance for advancement. Uncle Sam isn't going to call you into his private office, hand you a cigar, and say, "Well, now! I hear you've been doing a mighty fine job of this house-to-house work. From now on you're going to sit at this desk. No more nose-counting for you."

No, all you get out of this census business is a new list of noses to count tomorrow. Four-cent noses. Big ones and little ones, pug noses and hooked noses, and red, white and blue schnozzles—until you develop a case of nasal allergy. You feel that if the door opens on just one more nose you'll slam it back and go away after tweaking or punching that nose.

So here I was, waiting for this particular nose to stick out. I braced myself, and the door opened.

A sharp pinched beak appeared, the advance guard for a nondescript face and an ordinary housewife's body. The nose sniffed the air and hovered there somewhat uncertainly in the protecting shadow of the door.

"Well?"

"I'm from the U. S. Government, madame. I'm taking the census."

"Oh. Census-taker?"

"Yes. May I come in and ask you a few questions?"

This kind of sparkling dialogue went on all day. Just one great big exchange of personalities after another.

"Come on."

Down a dark hall, into a dark parlor. A lamp flared up as I set the bulky portfolio down on the table, opened it up, and drew out the form.

THE woman watched me. Her solid face was expressionless. Housewife's face. Used to watching encyclopedia salesmen and bill collectors, with one eye kept on the kitchen stove.

Well, thirty-five questions to wade through. Routine. I filled in the MALE or FEMALE bracket, and the RACE bracket, set down the address. Then, "Name?"

"Lisa Lorini."

"Married or single?"

"Single."

"Age?"

"Four hundred and seven."

"Age?"

"Four hundred and seven."

"Oh—what?"

"Four hundred and seven."

All right, so I work all day, so I run into a half-wit. I looked into the blank face. Well, hurry on, get it over with.

"Your occupation?"

"I am a witch."

"What?"

"I said that I am a witch."

For four cents it wasn't worth it. I pretended to write it down and skipped to the next question.

"Who do you work for?"

"I work for myself. And, of course, for my Master."

"Master?"

"Satan Merkatrig. The Devil."

FOR ten cents it wasn't worth it. Lisa Lorini, single, four hundred and seven years old, a witch, working for the Devil.

Oh, no, it wasn't worth while for fifty cents.

"Thanks. That's all. I'll be going now."

The woman wasn't interested. I folded up the sheet, jammed it into the portfolio, grabbed my hat, turned around, and headed for the door.

The door was gone.

Well, I can't help it. The door *was* gone.

It had been there only a minute ago, just a plain, ordinary door in an ordinary sitting room. There was an armchair at one side of it and a small table at the other.

Well, I saw the armchair and I saw the table. But there was no door in between.

I started off in another direction. Over here, perhaps. Still no door. No door anywhere in the room.

Walking around in the hot sun all day isn't good for anybody. Brooding about noses is the first sign. Then you begin to hear voices answering questions in a crazy way. After that you can't find doors. All right. I turned to the woman.

"Madam—would you show me the way out of here? I must have—"

"There is no way out."

Funny. I hadn't noticed the *quality* of her voice. It was pitched evenly, but low. Resonant. And there was no tiredness in it. I sensed something else. Was it—amusement?

"But—"

"I should like you to stay here with me for a while. It was fortunate that you dropped in."

"Dropped in," from a witch! But she *wasn't* a witch, damn it! There are no witches.

There are no doors.

"You will share a cup of tea with me."

"Really, I must be—"

"It is prepared. Sit down, young man, please do. I'll just take it off the fire."

Now I hadn't seen the fireplace behind me. I hadn't seen the flame. But the fire was burning, and there was a pot on the hearth irons. She stooped over, and a shadow fell across the wall.

It was a big, black shadow. Big and black, in the way that a frightened child says the words. A big, black shadow of a woman, creeping across the wall.

I stared at Lisa Lorini. She still looked like a housewife. Black hair, plaited and parted in the middle. A slim figure, unbent by years.

Four hundred and seven years—

A good thought to skip. Her face now; the nose was sharp, the mouth taut, the eyes slightly slitted. But the features were quite ordinary. Quite ordinary, except that the trick of firelight lent them a vulpine cast. A red face grinning as it bent over a pot.

No, she was feeble-minded. Feeble-minded, like the old hags they used to burn at the stake in medieval days. Hundreds of thousands of crones and beldames burned at the stake. All of them feeble-minded. Millions of them. All feeble-minded. Not a sane one in the lot. Of course not. Witches were a myth. All of the millions were merely crazy in the same way, with the same story. Millions of lunatics. There were no witches. Only—

Only I was afraid.

She was smiling at me. One claw—one hand, I mean—held out the cup. Steam spiralled up from a brownish liquid. Tea. Witch-brew. Drink it and—

Drink it and shut up! This was foolishness. I tried to look around again for the door, but it was dark in that room. The fire flickered so. It was quite red, that fire. I couldn't see clearly. Besides, it was hot in here. Drink the tea and get out.

She had a cup too. It wasn't poison. She hadn't dropped anything into it. What is it witches are supposed to drop? Herbs, I guessed. And all that stuff you read

about in *Macbeth*. They believed it in those days. Lunatics!

So I drank the tea. Maybe she'd let me out then. Or rather, I'd humor her and drink it and then get out. That sounded a little better.

"I don't have many visitors."

Her words came softly. Across the table I felt her eyes watching my face. I imitated a man smiling.

"I used to. But business has fallen off."

"Business?"

"Witchcraft. Sorcery. It's no good any more. So few people believe. They don't come to me for love-philtres, or little things like that, let alone the big things. I haven't made a poppet for years."

"Poppet?"

"ONE of those little wax dolls shaped like a man. The kind you stick pins in when you wish death upon your enemies. Men don't hate any more. They don't want a witches' curse. I have not killed for years. Business has fallen off."

Sure, sure. Kill anybody today? No? All right, let's close the office up, our business has fallen off.

Just a tired business woman. A career girl, no less.

But my hand trembled so I nearly dropped my tea-cup.

"All of my beautiful spells and—but you're not drinking your tea."

The condemned man and his hearty breakfast. Eat your cereal, it's good for you!

"Drink your tea."

Quite a spot. My head told me that I must drink it. Drink it to prove that she was crazy, or that I was crazy, that there were no witches and nothing would happen. My hands didn't want me to drink it, though. It took quite a bit of maneuvering to get the cup to my lips. She watched me as I sipped.

The tea was bitter, acrid, but warm. A foreign brew, but it wasn't Oolong. It went down easily enough, except for that tart taste.

"I am surprised, young man, that you evinced so little interest in my occupation. One does not meet a witch every day."

She had to tell *me*.

"I'd like to talk about it," I said. "Some other time. But really, I've got a lot of names on my list, and I have to be going. Thanks for the tea."

I kept looking around for the door. The fire made a sort of red pattern in the room —but not wholly there. The red pattern was in my head, too. It flamed and danced. The tea had been hot, and now heat shimmered through my head. Shadows mingled with the red pattern in the room, and they too seemed to invade my brain. Dark shadows from the dark brew of the tea. Shimmering red and shadows in my head, before my eyes, blocking the vision of the door. I couldn't see it. I had the illusion that if I concentrated hard enough, and long enough, I could find it. It was *there*, somewhere in the room, somewhere amidst the redness and the shadows. It *had* to be there. But I couldn't see it.

I could see her, though, quite clearly. Her nondescript features were stronger now. That grim, ironic smile held an ancient wisdom. She didn't need wrinkles. That smile was older than a mortal lifetime could engrave on a face. It was as old as the grin on a skull.

Yes, I could see her, even if I couldn't see the door for lights and shadows.

"I must go now," I said. My voice sounded far away. Only her eyes were close. Her eyes, holding the red light and the black shadow.

I stood up.

I *tried* to stand up.

Once I drank nine vodkas in a hot tavern, then rose to go home and found myself lying on the floor.

Now I had drunk a cup of tea and when I rose—

I rose.

Floated. My feet weren't touching the floor. They were resting on air—solid air, made up of red firelight, dark shadow-blur. My limbs tingled with something stronger than vodka. Little needles pin-cushioned my body. I weaved in air.

"I—"

"Don't leave yet." Her voice didn't notice my position. Her smile did. She understood, all right. "Don't leave yet," said Lisa Lorini. "I have so few guests. You must come with me tonight."

"Come with you?"

"I am going—out."

"A party?" Always the stiff upper lip, ready retort, mustn't realize where I was, *how* I was.

Her smile deepened, yawned, engulfed the thought. "Yes, you might call it that. And I need you as a matter of etiquette."

A witches' etiquette. Beezlebub and Emily Post! I was crazy, definitely. Floating in air, and talking etiquette.

"You see," said Lisa Lorini, "I must obey certain—rules. Just as you, holding a dinner party, must not seat thirteen at dinner. I must not hold a Sabbath unless there are thirteen present. A full coven. He wouldn't like it."

"He?"

"Satan Merkatrig." Again the smile. I began to dread that smile, prepare for it—like a convict lashed to a post, waiting for the next cut of the whip.

"And so you must come with me to the Sabbath tonight," said Lisa Lorini.

"A witches' Sabbath?"

"Exactly. We hold it on the hills. We have far to travel, so you must prepare."

"I'm not going."

YES, and a three-year-old kid isn't going to bed when its parents tell it to, either. I knew what good my refusal was when I wobbled there in the air. I knew it when I saw her eyes. She didn't have to emphasize it with her laugh, though.

I was learning fast. An hour ago it was lunacy. Now that chuckle crept up and scraped at my heart. Witchcraft, Black Magic, ancient dreads in a room of black and red. It was real; just as real as when thousands died screaming in the flames to expiate their evil in an age when men were wise enough to dread man's blasphemy before the laws of God and Nature.

"You are going. Maggit shall prepare you."

Maggit appeared. There was no door, so I don't know how Maggit got into the room. I don't know exactly what Maggit was, either. Maggit was small and furry, like a weasel with human hands—very tiny—and a *face*. It wasn't a human face, although Maggit did have eyes and ears and a mouth and nose. But the evil in that face transcended humanity—the evil, peering out from a tiny hood of animal fur, and grinning with a wisdom neither animals or humans should possess.

Maggit crawled across the floor and piped, "Mistress Lisa?" in a detestably shrill little voice that somehow shocked me more than anything else.

Maggit was—what was the term—the witch's familiar. The animal thing, given to a witch or sorcerer by the Devil, when the Black Bible of the Sabbath was signed in the coven. The little fiend, the familiar spirit, servant of Satan.

Only such things don't exist, save in the laws and the writings of every civilized nation for thousands of years. Such things cannot be.

So it was imagination that crawled up my floating body as I wavered, powerless to move a hand against that hideous, furry pattering that chilled my flesh. It was hallucination's tiny paws that began to rub my chest and throat with a yellowish

paste or salve Lisa Lorini gave to it from a jar on the table. It was legend that chuckled and rubbed the burning ointment on my limbs. It was nightmare that perched on my shoulder, chattered in my ear, and lisped unspeakable vileness as it rocked with glee.

"The flying ointment." Lisa Lorini's voice came through a burning wave that caused my tingling body to tremble. "Now we can depart."

I scarcely noticed her nakedness. The black hair, swirling now, covered her like a cloak.

Or a shroud. A shroud for long-dead wickedness to wear. Her slim hands rubbed the yellow paste upon her limbs. Her body floated upward, joined mine.

"No broomsticks?" I thought, hysterically. From some popular magazine I remembered an article on the "delusions of flight." Witch-ointment, rubbed on the limbs to give the illusion of flying through space. Popular fancy had transformed the ointment to broomsticks. But the salve was real enough. Powerful drugs. Aconite, belladonna, others. Giving rise to these hallucinations. Any chemist could prepare it. Run down to your neighborhood druggist tonight and—

I had to stop that.

I couldn't.

"Hold my hand." She grasped it. Two electric wires met. Tingling shocks ran through me. We were rising. Was that a door? Floating out. Darkness. Night. Floating along. She held me.

Superman, the cartoon character. Stop that hysteria! Up into blackness, her naked white body curved like the ivory horns of a half moon.

The cottage below. Witches' cottage. "Let me live in a house by the side of the road and—" Yes, very funny. "And be a fiend to man." Hysteria again. Who wouldn't be hysterical, floating through air with a Sabbath hag? And Maggit, chittering as it rocked on her shoulder, its tiny paws locked in her raven hair.

And then we swooped. I held on. The burning was gone now. The wind was rushing by. Below, the city twinkled. Cities always twinkle. Little lights, built to ward off the great blackness of night. The blackness where wolves howl and owls screech, the blackness where the dead dwell, and the things that are not dead. Lights to guard, lights to hide a fear. And we, above, flying through that fear, into its blackest depths.

I don't know how long, how far. I don't know how we descended. There was the dark, domed hill, and the fire flaring at its peak. There were the crouching figures—white against the shadowed hillside, black against the flaming fires. A horde of furry creatures scampered at the feet of the presences. There were eight, nine, ten—no, eleven.

Plus Lisa Lorini and myself.

Thirteen in a coven.

Thirteen—and the sacrifice.

I didn't look at the faces. They were not meant to be looked at, only *dreamed.* Lisa Lorini's own face was masked by exultation. It was she who prepared the sacrifice. The black goat was led to a rock before the fire. One of the other crones wielded the knife. A third held the bowl. And when the bowl was filled, all drank. Yes, I said *all.*

THAT ointment burned. Even on my feet it held me in a burning web. I couldn't run, I couldn't move out of the circle of firelight. And when the drum began to pound, I joined the circle. The furry things were lapping at the empty bowl, and their chattering was drowned in the drumming din, the howling.

"Lisa has brought an acolyte," wheezed one of the hags.

" 'Tis in place of Meg, who could not come," called Lisa Lorini.

Those are the last intelligible words I heard, the last intelligible thought I managed to retain.

Because the howling rose and the fire rose, and it became revival meeting—voodoo—bedlam, only worse than any of these prosaic terms. They were calling on somebody.

Somebody came.

No burst of flames. No lightning. No theatricals. That was all done by the crones. It meant nothing, really; no more than any savage cavortings about a stone idol.

Lisa Lorini was talking to him, pointing my way. He didn't turn his head, but he was aware of me. He didn't smile, or nod, or exhibit a single movement. But I *felt* him do those things. He handed out orders. He heard reports.

It was a business meeting. Satan and Co., holding a Board Meeting on a hilltop. Souls bartered, dark deeds recorded. And the black man scribbled in his book, the beldames babbled, and I crouched there trembling in the night while the little furry creatures skulked about my ankles. I shouldn't have trembled, for the black

Ever Hear Tell Of—

A PHANTOM CAR?

Well, one man finds that the ramshackle shade of his first auto follows him around — literally dogs his footsteps! And finally . . . *But wait and see for yourself in*

THE GHOST OF THE MODEL T

by BETSY EMMONS

This very different, very fascinating little tale is in your next number of WEIRD TALES

It was pure business. He stepped out from behind one of the rocks, carrying a large book under his arm, for all the world like a bank examiner coming to examine balances.

But bank examiners are not—black. He wasn't negroid, not in the least, but—black. Even the eyeballs, the fingernails. A black shadow, a limping shadow. Whether he wore a cloak, or whether a deeper shadow draped his figure, I don't know.

They were quiet when he entered the circle. He opened his book and they crowded around. Their mumbling rose in the night. I crouched down next to the rocks.

man's actions were very prosaic after all. Prosaic—as hell.

Then it happened. The white figures screamed down out of the dark sky. The clinging figure at its breasts dropped to the ground. There was a cry.

"Meg! Meg has come!"

Meg, the missing witch.

They turned as she advanced, breathless.

The black man *spoke* then. I won't attempt to set down the sound of it. Something of rusty locks and the primal grumbling of volcanoes. Age and depth, mingled in a sort of loathsome hissing, as though articulate human speech could not frame the concepts of daemonic thought.

"There are fourteen at coven."

I wasn't the only one trembling now. They all were shaking. White jelly figures in the firelight. The voice did it.

Lisa Lorini whirled. She dragged me into the circle before I could attempt resistance.

"I—I thought Meg wasn't—"

"There are fourteen. Fourteen."

The voice hinted. Just *hinted* its anger.

"But—"

"There is a Law. There is a Punishment."

The voice capitalized the words.

"Mercy—"

You don't ask *him* for mercy.

I saw it happen. I saw her clutch at her throat when his black paw grazed her wrist. Lisa Lorini writhed to the ground, wriggled for a moment like a white slug impaled on a stick, and then lay silent.

The black eyes, the black pupils turned to me.

"There must be thirteen. That is the Law. So you shall sign and take her place."

"I?"

You don't question *him,* either.

Somebody was holding the bowl. Another guided my hand, opened the book he gave to her.

I felt the clinging, furry form of Maggit move swiftly over my chest. It was at my neck—nibbling. A trickle of blood fell in the bowl. A sharpened stick dipped in it. The stick was placed in my hand.

"Sign," said the voice of the black man.

You don't disobey him—not when you hear the voice.

My fingers moved. I signed.

And then his hand, his black hand, reached out and gripped mine. I felt a surge, a blinding wave of redness, blackness, voice-depth, wind.

Something was lying on the ground now, but it wasn't Lisa Lorini. I glanced at the body because it looked familiar. It was my own body that lay there.

The black man was saying something again, but the buzzing drone of his voice was lost. The cackling from the circle about me was lost.

"I unbaptize thee in the name of—"

Maggit led me away. Maggit whispered, "Fly."

I didn't hear. The soaring journey back was instinct—instinct born in another's body, another's brain.

I slept in that house, slept in the darkness, slept in the conviction that when I awoke the dream would be over.

I awoke.

I saw the mirror.

I saw Lisa Lorini, witch, with my own eyes—peering out of her body.

Maggit chattered at my feet.

That was a week ago. Since that time I've learned to listen to Maggit. Maggit tells me things.

Maggit showed me her books, and her stock of herbs. Maggit told me how to make the philtres and the potions, and what to do to keep this body of mine from aging. Maggit told me how to brew the tea, and compound the paste. Maggit says that the coven meets again on the hilltop tonight.

I remember the rest, of course. I know that now I've signed the book and taken Lisa Lorini's place, I can't escape. Unless I use her method. Bring another to the coven, and let—etiquette—have its way.

That's the only solution.

TODAY, after a week, they must be looking for me. Census headquarters must have sent out another man on my route. Herb Jackson might take it over. He's in this district. Yes, Herb Jackson might knock on my door late this afternoon, and come in to ask Lisa Lorini some questions about the census.

When he comes, I should be ready.

I think I'm going to get busy and brew up a pot of that tea.

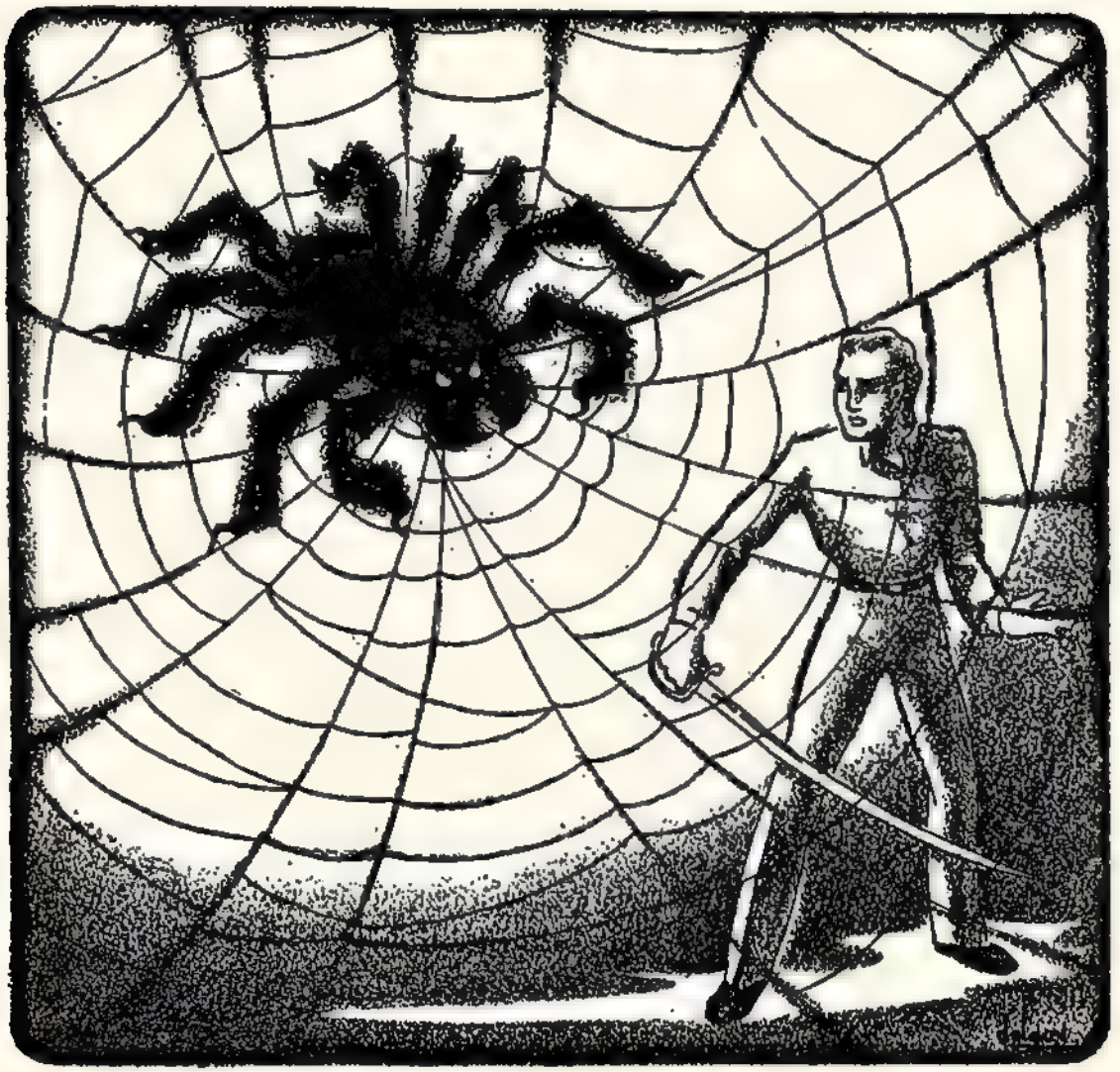
Spider Mansion

By FRITZ LEIBER

What was the terrible, terrifying rustling that haunted the house? And why did naked Fear itself squat everywhere, in every corner?

A TREMENDOUS splash of lightning gave us our first glimpse of the pillared front of the Old Orne House—a pale Colonial mask framed by wildly whipping leaves. Then, even before the lightning faded, it was blotted out by a solid sheet of muddy water sloshing up against the windshield.

"But I still don't like midgets," Helen said for the third time, "and besides—"



Close thunder, like thick metal ripping, drowned out the rest.

"It's gotten beyond a question of your or my personal taste in heights," I argued, squinting for a sight of the road between mud splashes. "Sure Malcolm Orne's a midget, but you don't know how slippery the road is ahead or how deep those Jersey salt marshes are on either side of it. And no garages or even houses for miles. Too risky, in this storm. Anyway, we figured all along we might visit him on the way. That's why we took this road."

"Yes, this lonely, god-forsaken road." Helen's voice was as strained and uneasy as her face, pallidly revealed by another lightning flash. "Oh, I know it's silly of me, but I still feel that—"

Again cracking thunder blanketed her words. Our coupé was progressing by heaves, as if through a gelatinous sea. I spotted the high white posts a little ahead, and swung out for the turn-in.

"Still really want to go on?" I asked.

Maybe it was the third blast of thunder, loudest of the lot, that decided her against further argument. She gave me a "You win" look, and even grinned a little, being a much better sport than I probably deserve for a wife.

The coupé slithered between the posts, lurched around squishily on a sharp slippery rise, made it on the last gasp, and lunged toward the house through a flail of lasting, untrimmed branches.

The windows in front were dark and those to the right were tightly shuttered, but light flickered faintly through the antique white fanlight above the six-paneled Colonial door. Helen hugged my arm tight as we ducked through the drenching rain up onto the huge porch, with its two-story pillars. I reached for the knocker.

Just at that moment there came one of those brief hushes in the storm. The lightning held off, and the wind stopped. I felt Helen jump at the ugly rustling, scraping sound of a branch which, released from the wind's pressure, brushed against a pillar as it swung back into place. I remember noting that the paint was half-peeled away from the pillar.

Then things happened fast. Groping for the knocker, I felt the door give inward. There was a deafening blast from *inside* the house. A ragged semi-circle of wood disappeared from the jamb about a foot from the ground. Splinters flew from a point in the floor eight inches from my shoe. The door continued to swing slowly open from the first push I had given it, revealing a Negro with grizzled hair and fear-wide eyes, clad in the threadbare black of an out-dated servant's costume. Despite his slouching posture he still topped six feet. Smoke wreathed from the muzzle of the shotgun held loosely in his huge pink-palmed hands.

"Oh, Lordy," he breathed in quaking tones. "Dat rustlin' soun'—I t'ought it was—"

SOMETHING, then, checked my angry retort and the lunge I was about to make forward for the weapon. It was the appearance of another face—a white man's—over the Negro's shoulder. A saturnine face with aristocratic features and bulging forehead. Judging from the way he towered over the gigantic Negro, the second man could hardly be more than a few inches short of seven feet. But that wasn't what froze me dead in my tracks. It was that the face was unmistakably that of Malcom Orne, the midget.

The Negro was grapsed and swung aside as if he were a piece of furniture. The gun was lifted from his nerveless fingers as if it were a child's toy. Then the giant bowed low and said, "A thousand pardons! Welcome to Orne House!"

Helen's scream, long delayed, turned to hysterical laughter. Then the storm, re-

commencing with redoubled fury, shattered the hush and sent us hurrying into the hall.

The giant's teeth flashed in a smile. "One moment, please," he murmured to us, then turned and seized the cowering Negro by the slack of the coat, slapped his face twice, hard.

"You are never to touch that gun, Buford!" Again the Negro's head was buffeted by a solid blow. "You almost killed my guests. They would be well within their rights if they demanded your arrest."

But what caught my attention was the fact that the Negro hardly seemed to notice either the words or the stinging blows. His eyes were fixed in a peculiarly terrified way on the open door, seemingly staring at a point about a foot from the floor. Only when a back-draft slammed it shut, did he begin to grovel and whine.

The giant cut him short with a curt, "Send Milly to show my guests their room. Then stay in the kitchen." The Negro hurriedly shambled off without a backward glance.

The giant turned to us again. He looked very much in place in this darkly wainscoted hall. On the wall behind him were a pair of crossed sabers of Civil War vintage.

"Ah, Mrs. Egan, I am glad to see that you are taking this deplorable affair so calmly." His smile flashed at Helen. "And I am delighted to make your acquaintance, though just now you have every reason to be angry with me." He took her hand with a courtly gesture. His face grew grave. "Almost—a hideous accident occured. I can explain, though not excuse it. Poor Bufort lives in abnormal terror of a large mastiff I keep chained outside—an animal quite harmless to myself or my guests, I hasten to add. A little while ago it broke loose. Evidently Bufort thought it was attempting to force its way in. His fear is irrational and without bounds—though otherwise he is a perfect servant. I only hope you will let my hospitality serve as an apology."

He turned to me. "Your wife is charming," he said. "You're a very lucky man, Tom."

Then he seemed to become aware of my dumbfounded look, and the way my gaze was stupidly traveling up and down his tremendous though well-proportioned form. A note of secret amusement was added to his smile.

Helen broke the silence with a little laugh, puzzled but not unpleased.

"But, excuse me, who are *you?*" she asked.

The wavering candlelight made queer highlights, emphasizing the massive forehead and the saturnine features.

"Malcolm Orne, Madam!" he answered with a little bow.

"But I thought," said Helen, "that Malcolm Orne was . . ." An involuntary expression of disgust crossed her face.

"A midget?" His voice was silky. "Ah, yes. I can understand your distaste." Then he turned slowly toward me. "I know what's bothering you, Tom," he said. "But *that* is a long and very strange story, which can best wait until after dinner. Milly will take you to your room. Your luggage will be brought up. Dinner in about three-quarters of an hour? Good!"

An impassive-faced Negress had appeared silently from the back of the hall, bearing in her ebon hands a branched candlestick. There were a dozen questions hammering at my brain, but instead of asking them I found myself following the Negress up the curving stairs, Helen at my side, watching the fantastic shadows cast by the candles.

AS SOON as we were alone, Helen bombarded me with a dozen incredulous questions of her own. I did my best

to convince her that the giant downstairs was really Malcolm Orne—there was the birthmark below his left ear and the curious thin scar on his forehead to back up the rest of the evidence—and that Malcolm Orne had been, when I last saw him, a midget who missed four feet by several inches.

I wasn't very successful and no wonder, since I could hardly believe it myself. Helen seemed to think I was mixing him up with someone else.

"You mentioned a brother—" she said.

I shook my head doggedly. "No possibility there," I told her. "Malcolm Orne did have an elder brother, but he died a year ago."

"And you're sure it's only a year and a half since you last saw Malcolm?" she persisted. "What was the brother like?"

"He was short, though no midget. About five feet. So don't go getting any wild theories of murder and impersonation. Marvin Orne was his name. A doctor. Made quite a reputation in New York, then came down here to start a country clinic in connection with research he was doing. Some of his work was supposed to be very important. Embryology. Cellular development. Hormones. Obscure vitamin factors. Growth processes."

There I stopped, suddenly realizing the implications of what I was saying. It was farfetched, of course, but—

"Go on, dear!" Helen prodded. "You've thought of something! Don't keep me in suspense." She looked interested and eager now, her uneasiness completely departed.

"I know it sounds awfully pseudo-scientific," I began cautiously, "but I suppose it's barely possible that, before his death, Marvin Orne discovered some serum or extract or whatever you call it, something to stimulate growth, and used it on—"

"Wonderful!" Helen interrupted, catching my idea. "That's the first sensible thing you've said tonight. I could believe that."

"It's only a wild theory," I hedged quickly. "The kind I warned you against. Better wait. Remember he hinted he'd tell us all about it after dinner."

"Oh, but what a wonderful theory!" Helen cut in. "Just think what it would mean to a man to be changed from a pygmie into a giant almost overnight. The psychological implications— Why, it opens up all sorts of vistas. He seems to be a very charming man, you know."

The last remark had a trace of impishness in it. I nodded though I didn't quite agree.

When we went down to dinner, she was still flushed with excitement, and I realized for the thousandth time what a thoroughly charming woman I had married. As if in response to a challenge emanating from the high courtly halls and rich though dusty woodwork, she wore her formal black evening gown with silver trimmings. And of course she had wheedled me into putting on a somewhat travel-crumpled dinner jacket.

There was no one in the hall, so we waited at the bottom of the stairs. The storm had died away and it was very quiet. I tried the high double doors to what was surely the living room, but they were stuck or locked. A faint but sharply nauseous stench rose to my nostrils. I noticed that Helen wrinkled her nose, and I took the opportunity to whisper, "There are some drawbacks, it seems, to ancient grandeur. Ancient plumbing, for one."

Then we became aware of the Negro Bufort standing uneasily at the very far end of the hall. As soon as he saw that we were looking at him, he bowed and motioned to us, then quickly turned and went out. We followed after. There was something very ridiculous about his long-distance courtesy. "I suppose he's embarrassed because of what happened,

and afraid we're still going to have him arrested," Helen speculated lightly. "The poor superstitious savage."

"Just the same, it was a narrow squeak," I reminded her. "But if Malcolm keeps the firearms safely locked up hereafter, I'll forgive the villain."

The dining room, where antique cut glass chandeliers glittered softly with candle-light, held another surprise.

"Tom . . . and Mrs. Egan," said our host, "I wish to present my wife, Cynthia."

SHE was literally one of the most lavishly beautiful women I have ever seen. Really creamy skin. Masses of warmly golden hair. A Classic face, but with the Classic angularity alluringly softened and the Classic strength missing. The strapless evening gown of red velvet emphasized a narrow waist, a richly modeled bosom and perfectly rounded, almost plump shoulders. Lavish was the only word for her. More like one of Titian's or Renoir's models than a modern or a Greek. She was Venus to Helen's slim Diana. There was a gleam of old gold from her hands and the pendant at her neck. Like a picture on exhibition.

She seemed a singularly reserved woman for one so gorgeous, acknowledging the introduction with a smile and a little nod. Helen too for some reason did not break into the lively if artificial feminine chatter one expects at dinner parties, and the meal began in silence, with Bufort pouring the white wine and serving the seafood in crystal hemispheres set in silver. The seafood was not iced, however, and as the meal progressed other deficiencies became apparent. The grizzled Negro avoided looking at Helen or myself, as he moved softly around the table.

While the seafood was being replaced by a thick meaty soup, Malcolm Orne leaned back sipping his wine, and said to me, "Quite a surprise to find that I was married? Well, there was a time when we too would have found it surprising, eh, dear?" The last remark was directed at his wife. She smiled and nodded quickly. I thought her throat moved as if she swallowed hard. His gaze lingered on her, his own smile becoming more expansive. "Yet things have a way of changing, or being changed, eh dear? But that's part of the mystery which must wait until coffee."

From then on conversation picked up, though one peculiar feature of it soon became obvious. Cynthia Orne did not join in at all, except for the most voiceless of polite murmurings—more gesture than word. Moreover, Malcolm Orne deliberately answered any questions directed at her. He did it with casual cleverness, but it was none the less apparent. For a while what was almost a verbal duel developed between Helen and him, she directing one remark after another at our hostess, he deftly or bluntly interposing. Helen was responding with mounting excitement to the atmosphere of mystery and tension.

After the soup the culinary pretensions of Buford and Milly rapidly collapsed. There followed a peppery stew, float—with fat, which sought to make up in quantity what it lacked in quality. It made a disagreeable contrast with the thick silver service and rich damask. And then I began to notice the other false notes: the great blotches of damp on the ceiling, the peeling wall-paper, the thumb-marks on the crystal, the not-quite-eradicated stains on the thick, hand-embroidered linen.

With the stew was served—inappropriately enough—a sugary port wine. Helen and I, our appetites satisfied, toyed with the meat. Cynthia Orne hardly touched a thing; she'd grow thin soon enough on this diet, I thought. But Malcolm ate enormously, voraciously, knife and fork

moving with a perfectly correct yet machinelike rapidity.

Gradually I found myself loathing the man. I think his attitude toward his wife was chiefly responsible, at first. He so obviously gloated in possessing her and dominating her, so that she dared not speak a word for herself. He was showing her off, drinking in our admiration. And he gloated in his mystification of us, too; his veiled references to coming revelations, his unwillingness to discuss even the lesser mystery of Buford and the mastiff. Oh, I was still devilishly curious to know the explanation of the baffling phenomenon with which we were faced—a phenomenon which had changed a midget into a giant—but my curiosity was dulled, and I felt that the solution would somehow be sickening. Again and again I studied his face, racking my memory for the exact appearance of Malcolm Orne the midget, comparing, contrasting. Even the head seemed larger, the forehead more swollen, though those features had been characteristic of the midget too. I tried hard to pretend that this was a different man—and I failed. The identity was too apparent. I went over in my mind the manner of Malcolm Orne the midget. Sardonic he had been, I recalled, and at times overly in love with his own cleverness.

A not very pleasant or kindly person. One expects such behavior in an individual seeking to compensate for marked physical deficiencies. Malcolm Orne the giant retained all these qualities, but there was added to them supreme self-satisfaction along with a wanton delight in exercising power. His sense of inferiority, which had been the balance wheel in his nature, was now gone, and the result was not very nice. And beyond all this I sensed something else—some unguessed, almost inhuman power or some equally unguessed, equally inhuman striving. Unwholesome force emanated from him. I recalled Helen's words: ". . . changed from a pygmie into a giant almost overnight. The psychological implications. . . . Why it opens up all sorts of vistas." I did not like the look of those vistas.

BUFORT splashed stew, a great puddle of it, on the tablecloth. I looked at him. His face was muddy with fear. It was the sound from outside that was affecting him—an excited growling and yapping, growing louder every moment. Malcolm Orne, frowning, half rose. I expected him to strike Bufort, but he did not. He was listening too.

"Sounds as if your mastiff's caught something," I remarked. Malcolm Orne impatiently motioned me to be silent.

Suddenly the sound changed in character, became a wail of terror, one vast horrid squeal that rose and fell without ever ceasing, like a siren. Moving with startling rapidity for so tall a man, Malcolm Orne darted toward the door. I rose to follow. He turned and rapped out a peremptory command, "None of you are to leave this room until I return." Then, seeing my angry look, he added with obvious effort. "If you please, Tom. I can best handle this alone." The door slammed behind him.

The wailing decreased in volume, though becoming more pitifully agonized. With a shrug I sat down. The Negress Milly had come in from the kitchen, and she and Bufort were clinging together in abject terror, though he if anything seemed the more frightened.

"Caught another dog, I suppose—" ventured Helen. Her voice trailed off.

"Very likely," I replied. But I was thinking that if there were a second dog involved he had a very similar voice.

"Well, I'm sure your husband knows just how to handle him, Mrs. Orne,"

Helen remarked with an attempt at reassurance.

Mrs. Orne did not reply. I looked at her more closely. Her lips were moving wordlessly, as though she were seeking to reply and unable to. Beads of sweat stood out on her white forehead, and trickled from the line of her golden hair. Her whole body was trembling, so slightly that you hardly noticed it at first, but continuously. Gradually it was borne in on me that this was no mere anxiety for her husband. She was in the grip of ultimate panic.

The wailing sank to a coughing moan, then mercifully ceased. And now we heard the voice of Malcolm Orne, in sharp accents of command.

Again Mrs. Orne seemed to be attempting unsuccessfully to speak. Her eyes were fixed on Helen's beseechingly. Then, with rapid nervous movements, she spread out her tiny handkerchief on the tablecloth, and began to write something on it in lipstick with shaking hand. We watched her, fascinated. There came the sound of slamming doors, and then, during one moment of stillness, a rustling, so very faint that I could hardly be sure I had heard, yet it wrung from Bufort a pitiful groan of horror. I recalled the first words we had heard him speak, "Dat rustlin' soun'—" Hardly a noise that one would associate with a mastiff.

Another door slammed. There were footsteps in the hall. In frantic haste Mrs. Orne wadded up the handkerchief and held it out to Helen, who quickly tucked it in the bosom of her dress. Then the door opened, and Malcolm Orne stood regarding us. His shoes and trouser legs were muddied.

"A dangerous beast—to outsiders," he remarked, breathing a little heavily. "A stray hound wandered in, and he tore it to ribbons before I could interfere." He looked around, as if challenging us to say that what we had heard hadn't sounded like a dog-fight.

"I shouldn't think you'd want to have such a brute around," said Helen rapidly.

He seemed about to reply when his gaze lighted on Bufort and Milly. "What do you mean coming in here?" he snarled at the Negress. "Get out! Bufort, we will take coffee now."

His urbane manner returned when he had settled himself again at the table. "Sorry I can't offer you coffee in the living room. But I've shut it up. It's a great barn of a place, two stories high, very hard to heat. Besides, before his death, my brother had begun to use it as a sort of laboratory, for his experiments." Again the gloating, secretive smile.

NIGHT-BLACK coffee, in fragile eggshell china, was something I welcomed. Malcolm Orne drained his cup, refilled it and began abruptly to speak.

"I'm hardly the right one to tell this story, since I'm no scientist. But I'm the only one who knows it all. So bear with me if I fumble for words." His manner belied what he said. He was obviously supremely self-confident, savoring the dramatic quality of his introduction. "Well, you may have heard something of my brother's work on growth processes. His early investigations created quite a stir. But first I should try to explain something.

"Growth, as I understand it, is not a process that has any absolutely fixed stopping point. It may stop early in the 'teens, or continue on well into the twenties. It may seem to stop, and then start again. Moreover, there are well-authenticated cases of growth during middle age. Though usually in such cases the growth is of an unbalanced and localized sort, as in acromegaly, where the bones of the hands and jaw become abnormally enlarged. Factors of heredity, diet, and climate are all of importance. Scientists to-

day are of course able to exert some control over growth by influencing glandular secretions. If they knew enough, their control would become complete. They would know how to start growth when it had seemed to stop forever.

"Perhaps my being a midget turned my brother's mind to this problem. But once he had begun, he pursued it with a single-mindedness that crowded out all other interests. Not that he had a narrow range of thought—he was a genius!—but he saw in every phenomenon some aspect of the process of growth. His country clinic here was a part of it—he made extensive statistical studies of the sizes and growth rates of country and city people.

"Growth Factor One—that was what he called the thing he was looking for. The hormone or sub-vitamin that influenced all the others. The ultimate physiological catalyst. The master-switch to turn on or shut off the whole process of growth."

HELEN and I were leaning forward now, hanging on his words. He waited for a moment, relishing the suspense, then said lazily, "Well, that's about all there is to the story. Except that eventually he found it. Found Growth Factor One." He rolled the words on his tongue.

"What was it, you ask? That's something I'd like to know too, now. But I'm no scientist. It was . . . something that was injected. That much I know, since after the preliminary experiments on animals and insects, I insisted on being his first human subject. You can readily guess why."

His gloating smile and his air of utter superiority were fast becoming insufferable, but you just had to listen.

"Yes," he repeated. "I think you can all readily imagine why a midget should want to grow. No one loves a midget, eh dear?" His words caressed his wife cruelly, like a whip dragged slowly across naked skin. "And a midget loves no one. Or at least that midget didn't."

He seemed then to become lost in reverie, but I felt sure he was only taking time to let his words sink in, and to absorb our unwilling interest. Helen gripped my hand under the table and I could feel her shivering.

Then, staring past us, he continued in a low dreamy voice, "An interesting thing, the way this Growth Factor One works. It doesn't merely increase the size of and number of body cells already existing. After the fashion of true growth, it develops new *kinds* of cells. I have, for example, in my brain, neurons of a sort that probably have never existed before. Very likely they have—new powers. The same holds for muscular cells. I could demonstrate. But it would be rather melodramatic, wouldn't it, if I crumpled this coffee urn in one hand? Incidentally, the growth process would work in the same way with animals. By careful use of Growth Factor One you might make an animal, as intelligent, almost, as a man."

He broke off and looked around at us, patronizingly. "Well, now you've heard it. A year ago my brother died. His work was turned over to a group of distinguished scientists. But his notes were inadequate and very confusing. I don't think they'll ever be able to learn much from them. I remain the sole product of his labors. The other creatures he experimented with were all destroyed."

HELEN gave a little squeal of fright and jerked away from the table. A tiny black spider was scuttling among the silverware. Malcolm Orne calmly reached out the gravy ladel left from the stew, and crashed it with a little thwack. Then, as Helen began to apologize for being so startled, we noticed that Cynthia Orne had fainted.

Her husband made no movement. For

a moment I stared at him, then hurried around and did what I could to revive her, chaffing her temples with a wet napkin, lowering her head to bring the blood back. Finally her lips twitched and her eyes shuddered open. Leaning over her, close to her face, I seemed to hear her murmur over and over again a peculiar phrase: "Not the web again. Not the web." Mechanically, almost inaudibly, but with an accent of extreme fear. Then she realized where she was and quickly sat up. She seemed embarrassed by my attempts to help her.

Malcolm Orne sipped the last of his coffee, and stood up. "It's time we were all in bed," he remarked. "Our guests must be tired from their trip. Come, dear."

She struggled to her feet, swaying a little, and took his arm. Helen and I followed silently, though angry words were on the tip of my tongue.

Right then and there I suppose I ought to have had it out with him, but after all it was his house, so I held myself in.

In the hall the unpleasant odor that I had ascribed to defective plumbing was more noticeable, and as we passed the high double doors of the living room I fancied I heard a faint sibilant rustling. Up the stairs we followed them, Cynthia Orne leaning heavily on her husband's arm. He did not look down at her. At the first door at the head of the stairs he paused. "Good night, dear. I'll be coming considerably later," he said. She unlinked her arm from his, nodded at us with the specter of a smile, and went in.

At the door to our bedroom he said good night, adding, "If you want anything, there's the bell-pull. Please don't consider stirring out of this room. The servants or I can attend to all your wants."

The door closed and his footsteps moved away. Helen drew out Cynthia Orne's handkerchief, spread it out on the table. We read it together. The lipstick had smudged, and the printing was hurried, but there was no question as to what the words were.

"Get out. For your lives."

Half an hour later I was tiptoeing in my stockinged feet down the almost pitch-black hall toward Cynthia Orne's bedroom. I felt slightly ridiculous and not altogether sure of myself. Meddling with the affairs of a married couple is undiplomatic to say the least. But Helen and I had decided there was nothing else we could do. Malcolm Orne certainly gave the impression of being vindictive, cruel, and dangerous. And the woman's warning to us implied that she herself was in danger. For her own sake as well as our own, it seemed imperative that one of us talk with her alone and find out what it was all about.

I had successfully negotiated the turn in the hall and was approaching the head of the stairs when the noise of talking from below brought me to a stop. It sounded like Malcolm Orne. After a few moments I inched forward past the bedroom door and peered over the ornately carved balustrade down the well of the stairs. There were no candles below, but the storm had blown over and moonlight shone through the fanlight—enough to illuminate vaguely the face of our host. An oblong of darkness showed me that the door to the living room was open, and there mounted to my nostrils that now-familiar stench, stronger than before. Somehow that odor, more than anything else, cut through my conscious mind to the hidden levels of fear below.

Orne was looking in that open doorway. At first I thought he was talking to someone, but afterward I became certain that he was conducting a wild moody monologue. At least, one does not expect a sane man to talk with the dead.

"You'll rot forever, eternally embalmed

in hell," were the first words I heard. He intoned them like a malign indignation. "Yes, dear brother, you're well taken care of. You who always felt so 'sorry' for me and wanted to make a 'real' man out of me, yet were so contemptuous of my intelligence that you treated me as a child. You with your babbling about 'humanity' and your moralizing lectures. Well, you succeeded all right. You made a man—or perhaps more than a man—out of me. But you found out too late what the consequences are. I wish you comfort, dear brother. I hope you like my wife's company. She's not been behaving well of late. Again good night, brother."

A MOCKING laugh ended this murderous confession. Then he whistled and snapped his fingers impatiently, as if calling a dog, and moved off toward the dining room.

It is not pleasant to confess that one has ever been literally paralyzed by fear, but what happened then did just that to me. I *saw* nothing. The moonlight struck too high to illuminate what issued from the living room and hurried down the hall after him. But there was a rustling, clicking sound—Merciful heavens, how I tried to convince myself a dog might make such a sound!—and it carried an indescribable impression of *swift* scurrying movement. With it came a sharp increase in the fetid stench.

I am not certain how long I crouched there with the cold sweat of terror breaking out from my forehead. Hardly a minute probably. Then my mind began to work again, returning automatically to the problem with which it had previously been engaged—the urgent need of conferring with Cynthia Orne.

Cautious rapping at her door brought no response. I tried it and found it locked. Then I risked a little louder rapping, and, with my lips close to the keyhole, softly called her name. Still no response. Memory of Orne's fantastic words rose in my numbed mind, "I hope you like my wife's company." And with those words the chilling possibility of murder rose in my mind.

Then, as I stepped back from the door, I heard again that abominable rustling, but this time behind me, in the direction of our bedroom. And then I heard Helen scream. That stung me into instant action. But in my reckless haste I misjudged the turn in the corridor and crashed against the wall. Half stunned, I staggered onward and wrenched open the bedroom door. The flickering light from the branched candelabrum revealed an undisturbed and empty room. Helen was gone.

My first move was toward the open window. Below, rapidly crossing the moon-silvered unkempt lawn, I saw two figures. But they were not the ones I expected. Burdened with an ancient carpetbag and several ragged bundles, Bufort and Milly were hurrying away from Orne House.

My next move, after quickly rummaging in my suitcase for the flashlight, was back toward the stair. I had remembered the crossed sabers on the wall in the hall below, and it seemed to me essential that I procure a weapon of some sort before I start my search. But I was stopped short at the head of the stairs, for again Malcolm Orne was standing at the library door. Only this time the front door was open too and this time his words were brief.

"After 'em boy. Get 'em, boy," he called, snapping his fingers and then pointing outside. There was a momentary pause. Then something scuttled like a shadow across the path of moonlight, moving with such rapidity that I could make out nothing of its shape except that it was squat but not small. Malcolm Orne gave a low laugh and followed it, closing the door

behind him. With a sickening heart I realized that the desperately fleeing figures I had seen crossing the lawn were to be hunted down.

But at least I was momentarily safe to pursue my search. I switched on the flashlight, hurried down the stairs and lifted one of the sabers from the wall. It was a heavy yet well-balanced weapon. Then I entered the living room.

The stench was nauseously thick here, the very air a sea of decay. My flashlight, directed at random, fell twice on moldering tapestries and then on something so incredible that I believed I must be going mad. Suspended in midair at the far end of the room, still clad in that red velvet evening gown, was the body of Cynthia Orne.

The head, its golden hair disarranged, lolled backward. The arms stretched taut to either side. Then I began to see the thin opalescently grayish strands that twined around her wrists and arms, and wrapped around her skirt, drawing it tight against her legs. The strands seemed to radiate off in all directions. My flashlight roved outward across the glimmering net-work. Horror and revulsion rooted me to the spot where I stood. The thing was a gigantic spider-web.

I saw that there were other victims. Here and there, thickest at the corners of the web, were forms suggestive of small animals, each wrapped in a shimmering cocoon. Shudderingly I recalled the eating habits of spiders, how they preserve their prey for the future. In the lower right-hand corner was the shape of a large dog, his silken wrappings only half completed. This, I told myself, must be the mastiff which had howled so horribly in the night.

AND then I saw the man. He was suspended close to the wall; a drab, fearfully emaciated thing whose shrunken face awoke groping, incredulous thoughts in my mind.

Filled with a mad desire to destroy that loathsome web, I stepped forward with upraised sword.

And then my staggered senses reeled at another blow directed at the seat of sanity itself. For the man, whom I thought could be nothing else but dead, spoke. His voice was a thin cracked whisper, but it carried a note of terrible urgency.

"Back, for your life! One touch of these strands, and you would be trapped forever, like a fly. Your sword would be entangled by the very strands it cut. Get that can of heavy grease behind you. There, by the table! Smear your hands and sword-blade with it. And bring the hooked pole that stands in the corner, and those things that look like firetongs. Smear them with grease too."

I do not like to think of the next half hour. I have never done work one-tenth as ugly and revolting—and always behind me the threat of the creature's return. Choking on the fetid air and with that fiendish webwork often only a few inches from my body, I hooked and sliced, dodged the flicking ends of cut strands, like a damned soul performing some endless task in hell. I think it was the voice of the man that kept me sane, directing me, warning me, sometimes rambling off, but never ceasing, like the voice of a hypnotist.

"First cut the strands above her head—the inside of the hook is sharp as a sickle. That will bring her down a good three feet. Now the strands below, and then those to either side, one by one. Carefully, man! And watch that loose one swinging by your neck. Flip it to one side so it catches! That's right. Oh, I know how to do this thing backward. A dozen times I've watched him and the beast hang her up there and then hours later, take her down. It's his way of punishing her be-

cause she once laughed when Malcolm Orne the midget asked her to marry him. Her mistake was that she fell in love with him after he grew tall, and let him marry her. Through her, he seeks to revenge himself on all womankind. I tell you, to watch that man and beast work together is the most hideous sight in existence. He hasn't let it poison her yet. That distinction is reserved for me. A slight bite produces paralysis—you know the habits of spiders? How they preserve their prey? I was last bitten a month ago. The creature was loose for a while tonight, killed the dog. But he lets it range around pretty freely. Boasts of his power over it.

"Gently now! Mind those strands to the left. There, that's done it. Now pull her away from it. Don't try to lift her. Slowly. Slowly."

I turned to the task of releasing the man, his voice still directing me. But now it rambled more often on to sidetracks.

"It must be a year I've hung here. And all because I was fool enough to change him from a midget into a giant—and a devil. He's literally no longer human. His schemes are those of a mad malign god. Do you know what he wants to make me do, besides tell him the secret of growth? He wants to force me to search for a *Negative* Growth Factor One, a degenerative hormone something that will make living things *decrease* evenly in size so that he can infect all mankind with it, in order that he may ultimately rule over a race of pygmies. But I won't! I tell you I won't!" His voice rose in a thin scream of defiance. But his next words were sane again. "More grease on your sword. It's sticking. And now sever that strand to the left, so I swing away from the main web."

Finally I got him down. He tried to stand, but his wasted limbs would not support him, and with a groan he sank to his knees. I saw that Cynthia Orne had recovered consciousness, and was pushing herself up from the floor. My mind, gradually emerging from the half-hour nightmare of frantic action, was beginning to function under its own power. I realized the danger that remained, and I remembered that Helen was still to be found. Perhaps she had been confined somewhere at the back of the house. I started for the door.

But through that door strode the towering form of Malcolm Orne. In his right hand was a flickering candlelabrum. Slung effortlessly over his left arm like a bundle of cloth was a limp form—Helen's. Acting instinctively, I directed the flashlight at his face. It seemed hardly to startle him.

"SO THE last fly has obligingly walked into the spider's parlor," he murmured, with a laugh. "Most convenient. First the charming Mrs. Egan, who does not like midgets, brought to join my dear brother and wife. Then those black fools finished off for good. And last but not least my dear friend Tom, who used to pity me so much in the old days."

But now his eyes, despite the dazzling beam of the flashlight, perceived that something was wrong with the web. Helen slipped from his arm as he placed the candlelabrum on the table and called peremptorily, "Boy! Boy!"

In that instant I flung the tongs. They struck him full across the forehead, and he swayed like a great tree and crashed headlong to the floor. I snatched up the sword and directed the flashlight at the open door. Then, before I could move to close it, there came a rustling and scurrying, and the horror was upon us.

Big as the dog it had killed, it regarded us from the doorway, its eight reddish eyes glowing evilly. I could see the swollen black abdomen and the black poison-dripping chelicerae, fangs that projected inches forward from its ugly little mouth.

Then it struck with a rush, one spring sufficing to carry it across Helen's supine, silk-clad form. With instinctive cunning it had chosen me as the most active opponent and therefore the one first to dispose of. Blindly I thrust out my sword, and, as it swerved away from the point, slashed out toward it. The wound it received was only slight, but it scuttled away to the shadows.

Someone was standing beside me. It was Cynthia Orne. Without a word she took the flashlight from me. I never expected such courage from her, but during all that hideous duel she kept the light fixed on the creature, leaving me free to wield the sword alone. The beam never once wavered, nor did the creature manage to escape from the circle of light.

And then I noted that Marvin Orne was painfully crawling straight toward his prostrate brother, unmindful of the scuttling monster. Death was in Marvin Orne's sere face!

When my sword found its black body for a second time, the spider changed its tactics, ran with incredible rapidity up the tapestry, and launched itself down at me. I sidestepped. It only missed my sword arm by an inch!

And now Malcolm Orne had risen dizzily to his knees, but simultaneously his brother was upon him, clawing at his throat. It was an unequal contest, but for a moment Marvin Orne had the advantage. They rolled against the table, knocking off the candlelabrum, whose flames began to lick at the bone-dry tapestry.

The glance I spared on this other conflict nearly cost me my life. A sticky strand whipped around the hilt of my sword, almost wrenching it from my hand.

I tore at the sword to free it. Malcolm Orne, I saw, had warded off his brother's feeble attack. And now for the first time I realized the full strength of the giant. His fist rose and fell, again and again, smashing in the skull of Marvin Orne as if it were an eggshell. Flame was roaring up the tapestry now, and the whole room was illuminated by a wild reddish glow.

The monster swooped down at me like a nightmare. I threw myself down, thrusting upward with the sword. This time it went home, thick blood oozing from the wound. I scrambled to my feet, raising my weapon for a second blow. But the monster, badly hurt, was moving away from me now toward Malcolm Orne. What the giant saw in those eight evil eyes I do not know—perhaps some long-nurtured hate for its master—but he threw up his hands and screamed horribly. The dying monster ran up his body. I followed it thrusting again at the black abdomen. But the chelicerae had done their work. Malcolm Orne screamed once again, a tortured bellow of anguish. Then Cynthia Orne was pulling me backward, out of the path of the falling tapestries, which collapsed with a roar, wrapping the monster and its master—and the dead body of Marvin Orne—in a flaming shroud.

It missed Helen by inches. But before the flames could reach out across the carpet, I had dragged her aside. As I raised her in my arms I saw her eyes blinking wonderingly open, and felt her hand tighten on my shoulder.

Then, like lost souls escaping from some hell, we fled from that house of monstrous growth and forbidden secrets, lost to science. As I sent the coupé roaring down the drive, I spared time for one glance over my shoulder. Flames were already eating through the shutters below the pillared facade. Soon, I knew, the whole white mask of Orne House would be one roaring holocaust.

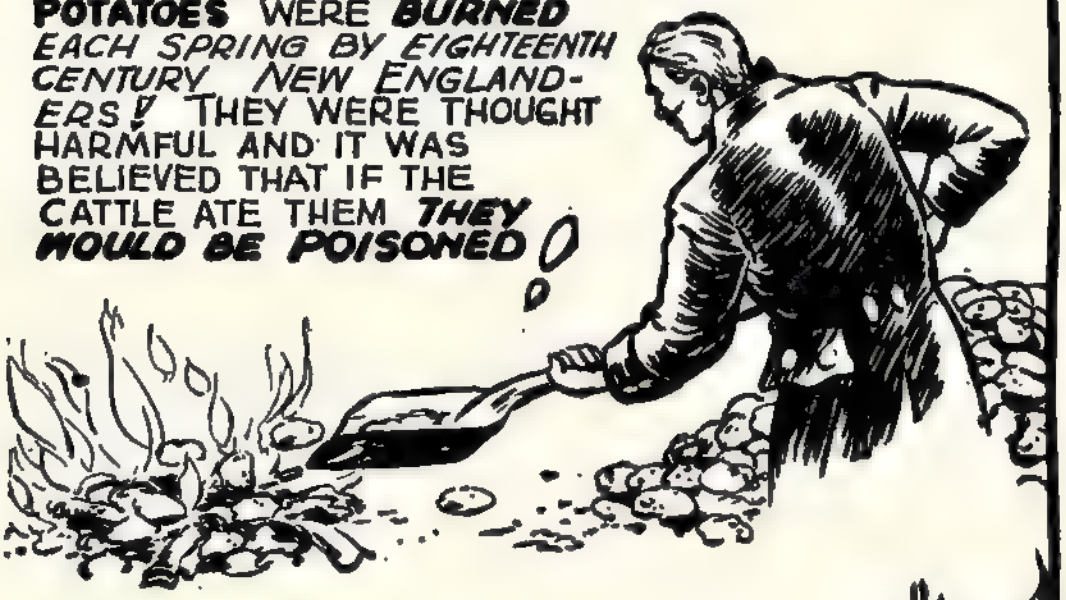
SUPERSTITIONS

WHEN A **CHEROKEE INDIAN** SORCERER DESIRED TO DESTROY A MAN, HE GATHERED UP HIS **VICTIM'S SPITTLE** ON A STICK AND PUT IT IN A JOINT OF **WILD PARSNIP,** TOGETHER WITH **SEVEN EARTHWORMS** BEATEN TO A PASTE AND SEVERAL **SPLINTERS FROM A TREE** *WHICH HAD BEEN STRUCK BY LIGHTNING!* HE THEN WENT INTO THE FOREST, DUG A HOLE AT THE FOOT OF ANOTHER TREE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, AND DEPOSITED IN THE HOLE THE JOINT OF WILD PARSNIP WITH IT'S CONTENTS. FURTHER, HE LAID **SEVEN YELLOW STONES** IN THE HOLE, THEN FILLED IN THE EARTH, *AND MADE A FIRE OVER THE SPOT* **TO DESTROY ALL TRACES OF HIS WORK...** IT WAS BELIEVED THAT IF THE CEREMONY HAD BEEN PROPERLY CARRIED OUT, THE MAN WHOSE SPITTLE HAD THUS BEEN TREATED *BEGAN TO FEEL ILL AT ONCE... HIS SOUL WOULD SHRIVEL UP AND DWINDLE,* **AND WITHIN SEVEN DAYS HE WOULD BE A DEAD MAN**

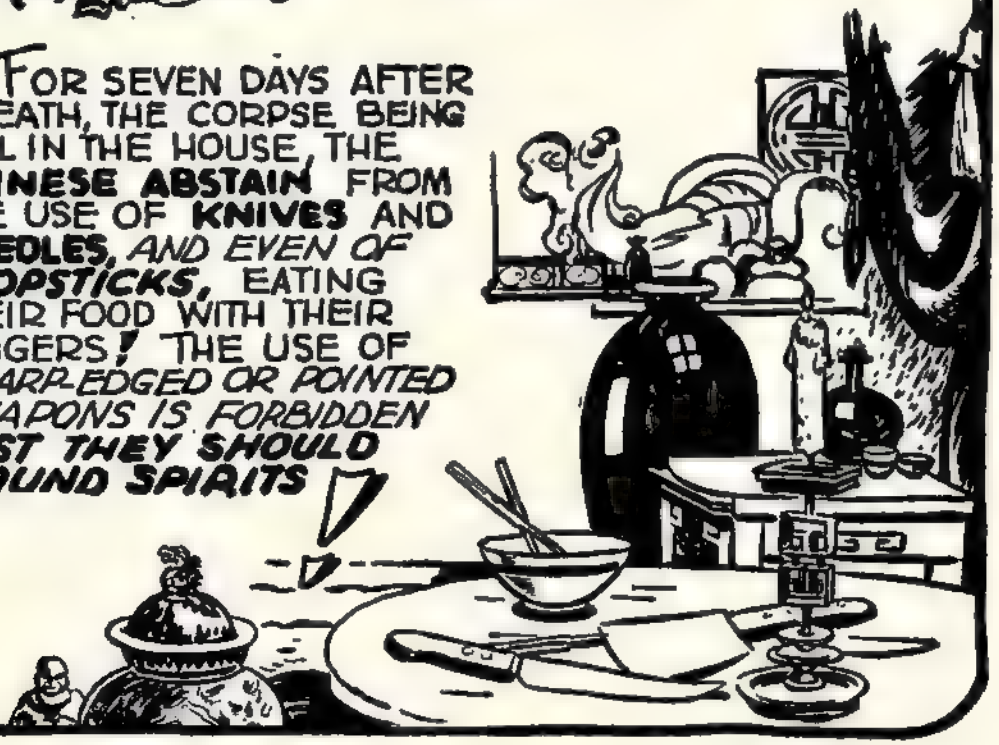
AND TABOOS

by Hill

LARGE STOCKS OF **POTATOES** WERE ***BURNED*** *EACH SPRING BY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NEW ENGLANDERS!* THEY WERE THOUGHT HARMFUL AND IT WAS BELIEVED THAT IF THE CATTLE ATE THEM ***THEY WOULD BE POISONED!***



FOR SEVEN DAYS AFTER A DEATH, THE CORPSE BEING STILL IN THE HOUSE, THE **CHINESE ABSTAIN** FROM THE USE OF **KNIVES** AND **NEEDLES**, *AND EVEN OF* ***CHOPSTICKS***, EATING THEIR FOOD WITH THEIR FINGERS! THE USE OF *SHARP-EDGED OR POINTED WEAPONS IS FORBIDDEN* ***LEST THEY SHOULD WOUND SPIRITS***



The Bridle

THEY needed a doctor at Lownsberry Corners.

As I needed a practice and could ill afford to purchase one I went to Lownsberry Corners, rented a house, bought a horse and a two-wheeled cart. Then I hung out my shingle.

Had I been other than a penurious young man, I would have driven through the Corners from one end to the other

Here are the facts: the leather is human skin—the microscope proves it; the bit is solid silver, and very old—as old as Witchcraft. And the bridle has power—strange, incredible, terrifying power!

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

and then settled somewhere else. But —I had to live somewhere.

Surely a year or two in that half-detached section of Pennsylvania would at least do me no harm.

I had a small income which I felt sure would supply any need until practice was established. The nearest fellow-practitioner lived ten miles away at Rounsville, therefore I was certain of some medical

work, especially in the winter when the roads were deeply drifted.

Lownsberry Corners was on top of the world. There two roads crossed at right angles, giving an excuse for a store, a church, a doctor and a name for the spot. One road ran along the crest of the mountain ridge; the other slid down to Corydon on one side and slanted to Rounsville on the other. The top of the ridge was naked of timber, but there were farms on either side of the road. Where the mountain dropped to the Conewango and the Allegheny it was heavily wooded. From an airplane the ridge road would have appeared as an ugly scar, yellow and crooked, between two stretches of green forest.

It was a scar. A hundred years before hardy pioneers had hit the ridge with their axes. They cleared the land of the beautiful white pine that nature had spent centuries in developing; they sent the logs to the sawmill; down even as far as Pittsburgh and St. Louis. The great pine roots were torn up and used for fences. On the cleared fields they raised hay, oats and wheat. For decades the land yielded all and received nothing in return. There was no humus left in the soil. The rains of summer, the melting snows of spring, washed everything good out of it and left merely the clay which refused to nurture anything except the goldenrod and the wild asters.

The lofty barns, once bursting with the yearly harvest, now slowly rotted in decay. The second and third generations were realizing what starvation meant. Those few with courage and initiative abandoned the farms, moving to other localities, but many families stayed on. Each year crops grew smaller and poorer in quality; the orchards rotted; even the flocks of sheep looked dismal as they cropped the sparse grass.

"They tell a story about a rabbit," Will Jordan, the blacksmith, said to me the first day I took my horses in to be shod. "Old Rabbit was a traveling down the road with his pack on his back. He was traveling fast for he was hungry. 'Where are you going, Rabbit?' asked the Preacher. 'It's this way,' Old Rabbit replied, 'my uncle died and left me a hundred acre farm at Lownsberry Corners. I went up there, hunted all over the place for three days and couldn't find enough to keep me alive, so I'm giving up the farm and going down to Ackley Hollow to work at the saw mill. I can at least make a living'."

As I became better acquainted with my neighbors I found that only two families were comfortably situated. The others, including the parson stayed because there was no way of getting out. They were cold in the winter, hot in summer and hungry all the time. The storekeeper was king of finance at the Corners. The pastor received four-fifths of his meager stipend from the Home Missionary Society of his denomination. The rest of us seldom saw a dollar.

I did what I could for the sick and ailing for what I could get in payment. Often it was a chicken or oats and hay for the horse. In the fall sometimes there was potatoes and apples or other vegetables and once it was a foxhound pup. My library was large and since I enjoy reading the times passed not too dully. At least my horse and I had three meals a day and a place to sleep.

OCTOBER of that first year of private practice was more than unprofitable. Oh yes I had callers at the office and I made calls. But such callers! Once a boy came in with a dozen four-ounce bottles which he wanted me to buy for five cents each. He seemed familiar and I asked his name which he said was Miller. I refused to make the purchase, reminding him that I had furnished those bottles full of medicine to his father, Ruben Miller, and had not received a cent of pay. But the

boy refused to yield the basket and said he would walk to Rounsville and sell them to Dr. Vermile. Twenty miles for sixty cents!

A bit later one of the Holt girls came in, a poor little thing with a twisted face and a crippled leg. She had been saving the lining of chicken gizzards as someone had told her I would pay two cents each for them. I gave her a quarter for her imagined treasures and she left with a smile on her tiny twisted face.

An early frost had sent the brown and crimson leaves falling in deep winddrifts on the sodden ground. The roads were heavy with slick, greaselike mud. Only a few miles of driving was sufficient to completely cover the cart with dirty yellow clay. It was not clean, healthy mud; it had an unhappy, sickly feel as it hit the flesh and dropped off. I learned to hate that mud; yet I knew it made it easier riding than after it had frozen into deep ruts.

Every day I hitched up and went for a drive both to exercise the horse and to make the neighbors believe that I had patients to care for. On one of those imaginary calls I had my first meeting with "The Miller Girl." I had heard much of her and her ethereal beauty but had never had chanced to meet her.

It was past five in the afternoon and the sun was edging toward the floor of the valley, flooding the sky with crimson and orange splendor. I had passed the old stone cider mill and was dreamily debating what I should cook for supper when my horse shied and almost overturned the cart. From the scrub beside the road came a scornful laugh—then into the very middle of the road stepped the Miller girl. No mistaking her, once you had seen her. A she-devil from Hell, the other women called her, but if thus Hell be populated why strive for Heaven? She was beautiful from the ends of her windblown chestnut hair to the tips of her toes, protruding from waterlogged, rotting shoes. Just once I looked at her and wondered why she had remained a maid so long. I said as much to her.

"'Twas worth being put into the ditch to meet you, Aline Miller."

"You're the new doctor?"

"Correct. Where have you been all these six months that I've been here without a glimpse of you?"

"I've been down to Walden—out to service."

"And you came back unmarried?"

She laughed bitterly, cynically, with a twist to her lips.

"Those who would have me I want not and those I would have I cannot. I went away to get rid of that pestering Ethan Holt. Know him? The old fitting fool! The nerve of him to think he could ever marry me! He gave me no peace but I'm not afraid of him now. I can go and come when I like, here or there. I don't need to be afraid of him any more—the fitting fool!"

She flung her beautiful hair from across her face and strode past me down the road, my horse quivering and rearing as if in fear as she passed him.

"A wild woman," I mused to myself. "A wild woman and none too good. Even if Holt is an epileptic she should know better than to call him a 'fitting fool.' But she is beautiful! I don't blame him for wanting her though. The Holts and the Millers! Wonder what imps of Hell bred that spawn? Which family is the more degenerate? One family produces a woman with the body of Venus and the other a man with the face of a bull and the mind of a demon."

I drove on and almost immediately the Holt boy stepped from the roadside brush. He had the shoulders of a giant, the legs of a cripple and the forehead of a bull. I never saw such frontal bosses; enormous overgrowth of bone that made his eyes ap-

pear to shine in dark recesses of forehead. For some reason he liked me. He always wanted to stop and talk whenever we met on the road. He came and leaned against the top of the cart wheel.

"The Miller girl is back, Doc," he said. On his face was the look of an animal in intense pain.

"I know. I just met her a piece back on the road."

"Did she—did she say anything— 'bout me, Doc?"

"Yes. Said you wanted to marry her. Do you?"

"I do, Doc, but she don't like me. Not at all. Know what she calls me? 'A fitting fool.' That ain't right, Doc, for 'taint my fault about the fits; and I would be kind to her, if she wedded with me."

"I believe you, Ethan."

"Would you talk to her about me, Doc? Tell her you know I'd treat her gentle like?"

"It wouldn't do any good, Ethan, my boy. She is set against you."

"Is she 'feard of—me?"

"She said she used to be, but not now."

"She better be! I could break her in two, just as easy as this," closing his great hands over her imaginary body he made a breaking motion, then spread his huge fists as if dropping something to the ground.

"You wouldn't hurt her if you loved her. Anyway, she is not afraid. She told me so."

I LEFT him standing in the mud and drove off with misgiving in my heart. As I passed the blacksmith shop I decided to pause for a moment's conversation with the smithy. He was well educated and I enjoyed him. Seeing me he threw down his hammer and came out to the cart.

"How's business, Doc?" he asked.

"Like the weather, rotten. I just met the Miller girl."

"Better watch out. She has a peculiar reputation."

"For what?"

"You'll think I'm simple-minded."

"Go on, tell me. How can a man be simple-minded when he can read Dante in the original Italian."

"All right, you are asking and I am answering: Every generation of Millers breeds one who is in covenant with the Devil. Now you know the answer."

"You mean she is a witch?"

"Call her anything you wish but that is what I mean."

I had thought to argue with him, changed my mind, paid him a dollar I owed him and invited him over that night for a game of chess. Bedding my horse mechanically I was tormented by what the smithy had said. For a few moments while waiting for the house to get a bit warmer I cursed my loneliness. But the thought of the folly of the Holt boy in wanting to marry that wonderfully beautiful Miller girl crowded always to the front. Dress her in becoming mode and give her the opportunity she would make any man a splendid wife, I was sure. It must have been that I even dreamed of holding her in my arms that night for I was calling her name when daybreak came.

A heavy pounding on my door brought me back to reality. The little crippled Holt girl was there, shivering in the cold. She asked would I please come and see her brother Ethan. Before we started out into the cold I gave her breakfast and coffee. Holding the reins with one hand I held her, wrapped in a blanket, close to me on the cart seat. It was a long, slow ride, through the frozen mud, till we slid down through the woods to the Holt farm.

My first look at the boy convinced me that he had had a series of convulsions, real *Status Epilepticus*. He was now in a stupor, his open mouth and protruding, lacerated tongue, showing how badly he

had bitten himself during the convulsions. The bloody foam had dried on his cheeks and chin. Picking up a hand to feel the pulse I found the palm covered with mud. The other hand was soiled likewise and, blankets off, I found the feet and legs muddy, the dirt dried clear to the knees. Wishing to listen to his heart, I opened his shirt, and discovered his body blood-stained, on either side a number of punctate wounds, like stabs with a small dagger.

"Where was he all night?" I asked his mother.

She stared back at me, a sullen fright in her eyes.

"Was he in bed?" I demanded.

"He must 'ave been out wandering," she replied at last.

There was nothing to be gained in questioning her, so through elimination, stimulation and with the help of his iron constitution, I finally restored consciousness. He cried as he moved. Later he complained that every muscle hurt him. I washed his mouth out, painted his wounds with iodine, left some medicine and tossing his little sister a dime promised to return the next day.

He did not wait for me to call on him but was waiting at my office bright and early. He brought with him eggs, two cocks and a jar of honey. At least he was appreciative; but he would not talk. He simply stated he could remember nothing of the night. I did not believe him but was sure he was evading the truth but did not have the heart to call him a liar. As he reached the office door he turned.

"I ain't afeard of that Miller girl, Doc." he called.

"That's good, Ethan."

"She did me dirty, Doc. But I ain't fear—I aim to tame her some day—dammer! I could nearbout kill her only—I do love her, Doc."

"Poor fool!" I said to myself as he closed the door. "Poor fitting fool."

"For the next three days Lownsberry Corners was storm swept. No one sent for me and I was glad. I fed the horse and dozed by the fire. When the rains finally ceased I ventured out to the store for necessary provender and found the countryside more sodden and desolate than before —which had always seemed the ultimate.

A FEW loungers were at the store gossiping about the trivial things that become so important when our lives are dreary.

Someone made the statement that Ethan Holt had a new mare, and a wild one at that. This made me prick up my ears with interest. How did he ever pay for it? Or had he stolen it? It would not be the first time a horse thief had been traced to the Corners. But when Ruben Miller came slouching in all talk ceased. Nobody liked him and all were more or less afraid of him because of his brawny muscles, his vicious tongue or both. He was in an ugly mood.

"That slut of mine's run off again!" he snarled.

"Meaning Aline?" asked the storekeeper.

"Who else?" Miller responded as he helped himself to the crackers. "Thinks she can come and go as she damned pleases. But this time when she comes back I'll beat her 'til I kill her."

"Perhaps she run off with the Holt boy?" suggested a wit.

"No. Hell No! She's bad but she ain't no fool. She wouldn't trifle with that spawn of the Devil."

Ethan's father, who had been sitting silent behind the stove, now jumped at Miller with an ax handle raised over his head, as if to brain Miller. We parted them but both men were ripe for murder. They hated one another bitterly and on the

slightest provocation were at one another's throat.

Somehow I was relieved as I left the store and slushed my way through the muck to the blacksmith shop. I felt quite certain that if the girl had stayed at the Corners she would, eventually, have made a fool of me. Now I could put her out of my mind and—heart.

THERE was excitement aplenty at the smithy shop. Ethan Holt had brought his new mare to be shod. It was the first shoeing and she fought furiously. A twister on her upper lip and one foot reefed up held her in the shop. Holt had put a bridle and cruel gagbit on her and when he jerked the reins the blood spurted from her opened mouth. She was a beautiful creature, looked as though there was some Arabian blood, all glossy chestnut in color save a white star between her eyes.

"Hurry up with it, Bill," Holt yelled to the blacksmith. "Don't take time to pound those shoes to fit. Put 'em on red hot and let 'em burn into place, but clinch the nails good and tight."

"That's no way to shoe a horse for the first time, Ethan," protested my friend. "She is a valuable animal. Might lame her if I hurry."

"Do as I tell you," commanded the epileptic. "I am paying for this shoeing and it's my horse. Damn her! I'll break her if I have to kill her."

The smith did as Ethan commanded and put the shoes on almost white hot. The mare struggled until the sweat ran down her flanks, and when the nails went in she squealed, almost cried. I never heard a horse make a noise like that, but at last it was over. Ethan leaped into the saddle, the twister was taken off and, digging his spurs into her flanks, almost throwing her with the gagbit, they dashed out of the forge.

William Jordan took off his apron and told his helper to go home as he was closing shop.

"Come over and play chess tonight," I suggested.

"No thanks, Doc. There is a meeting at the church. Better come."

"I am not much interested, Jordan," I replied, trying to make my refusal sound kindly. He took it seriously.

"My boy, let me give you a word of advice. I have lived for many years in Lownsberry Corners. We have good people and bad. Much of the time it seems that the Devil is running things; but now and then the sun shines, and we know that God is in Heaven and all's well with the world. If you live here, you have to be on one side or the other. You have to serve God or the Devil."

"You mean figuratively, Jordan?"

"No, I mean actually. Take the Millers and the Holts. They have followed the Devil for many generations. Their ancestors were burned in Scotland for just that. Of course, we don't burn witches here in Pennsylvania, but that does not mean they do not exist. I am convinced that the Miller girl is in covenant with the Evil One. When she leaves here she says she has been to Walden, but I fear it is in Hell that she vacations."

"I laughed at that as I rather scornfully said:

"There are no more witches, Jordan."

"You mean you think there are no more witches."

"That is what I mean."

"Thinking don't make it so, Doc."

And thus we parted.

Back in my house I could not keep from thinking of that mare and how cruelly she had been treated. The memory of her burning hooves made me sick. Finally I could restrain my desires no longer. Opening my old trunk I counted out one-hundred dollars, precious coin!—and lantern in hand started for the Holt farm, slip-

sliding through the mud for I would not drive, risking the laming of my horse, unless necessary. It was a long two-hour walk and as I approached the house I saw it was unusually lit up and, as I came nearer, I heard the wailing of a woman. Once inside the kitchen the cause of the keening was soon disclosed.

MRS. HOLT took my hand and led me into one of the bedrooms—pleading with me to do the best I could. But there was nothing I could do; the boy was dead. He had had a fight with the mare—his last fight. She had squeezed him against the side of the stall until he fell, breathless, and then she had stamped him into a horrible jelly. Those new shoes he had burned into her hooves had put him beyond all recurring fits. The women were weeping loudly but his father stood stiff and still with a rifle cradled in the crook of his arm. Seeing that and understanding, I spoke before he could.

"After this you won't want to keep the mare, Mr. Holt. This is a bad business. You will need some ready cash, right now, so here is one-hundred dollars, if you will sell me the mare."

I held out the money. He stared at it; the women ceased to wail and looked at the bills. But he held to his rifle.

"I aim to kill that mare!" he snarled.

Putting the money into his hand I took the lantern and left the house. When he did not follow me I knew that I had bought the mare. And I had a horse already.

The mare pricked her ears when she heard me enter the stable but there was no fight left in her. Tying a halter rope around her neck I turned her in the stall and led her to the road where we began our two-hour trudge toward home.

Suddenly the clouds disappeared as if by magic from the sky, leaving a full golden moon-ball against a strange, translucent blue ceiling seemingly trying to bathe this desolate part of the earth in loveliness and beauty.

When we came to the watering trough, a half-cider barrel, rotted and splintery on the outside and moss grown within, with the moon mirrored in the smooth water, the mare stepped eagerly toward it. Any horse lover could tell she was burned-dry-thirsty. She made a sorry attempt to drink with the gagbit in her mouth—so I slipped the bridle off.

The mare drank and drank as if she could never slake her thirst, then suddenly, like lightning, she lunged to the left of me, and tearing the halter rope from my hand, dashed down the moon-shadow-streaked road.

I stood staring vacantly at the bridle—a hundred dollars thrown away, for I was sure I would never see the mare again. "A fool and his money," I thought, resuming the trek home in bitter anger, shame and remorse. It would have been better for Holt to have shot the beast. A life for a life— Well, at least it was even. He had lost his son and I had lost a horse. But I had a bridle.

At last comfortable in slippers and robe I examined the piece of harness most carefully under the oil lamp. It was a very peculiar bridle and the bit, highly polished, showed not a sign of rust. The whole thing exuded a strange odor, like something dead, but unlike any old leather I had ever handled. The reins were ornamented with many small silver studs and two larger studs, set with red stones. I was puzzled and determined to show it to the blacksmith the first thing in the morning, for he was an expert in harness and leathers.

Daylight, however, brought an urgent call. Unfortunately it was the Miller family, and so far, they had not paid even a penny on a very large bill. But when the boy told me that his sister had come home and was badly hurt, so they all feared she would die, I had to go, pay or no. With-

out waiting for breakfast I hitched the horse to the cart and drove through the splashing mud with the white-faced boy hanging to the seat as best he could as we slued and slid down the gummy road. I was shocked at what I saw inside the Miller house.

The Miller girl had indeed come home but where had she been? The self-confident, unafraid beauty of a few days previously was now a pitiful human wreck, burning with fever. Her lips were torn; her tongue parched and bleeding. I picked up one hand and saw that the palm was seared, deeply, in a semi-circle, and there was dried blood on the hand. It was very hard to even imagine what had happened, but around the girl's neck was a halter rope. I was thinking fast and in another minute I might have found the answer to the mystery, but in that minute Ruben Miller entered the room, cursing and striking at the women folk who tried to hold him.

"I told her I'd beat her to death and I'm gwine to!" he yelled, bringing the snapper of a blacksnake whip down across the poor girl's pain-distorted face. It was more than evident he had been drinking, even more than usual.

"No more of that!" I commanded, grabbing the whip. "Bad enough to have her nearly dead without having murder on your soul."

He attempted to jerk the whip from my hand, crying:

"What is she to you?"

HONESTLY I do not know what made me do it—the words came from my lips as though I were a puppet; some other person giving my words voice.

"Didn't she tell you? We are going to be married. I asked her and she agreed and then she disappeared. She is going to be my wife, some day; in the meantime I am going to take her to my home and try to save her life. If she dies, however, I will bury her—without expense to you."

That bothered him. Even in his drunkenness he saw that it might be most advantageous to have the girl married. But he was crafty.

"What do I get out of it? Been a lot of trouble and expense raising that slut. Tell me—what do I get?"

"If you promise to leave us alone and stay away from her, I'll give you a check for one-hundred dollars."

"Fair enough—don't ever worry about my coming around where she is" said Ruben Miller, licking his lips and trying to figure how long the hundred would keep him in liquor. I sat down and wrote the check. That was twice in twelve hours that my money had saved a life; first a horse and now a sick girl.

Granny Miller came hobbling into the room just as I was wrapping Aline in a blanket.

"I want my bridle," she whined. "I want my bridle, my pretty bridle. Some one's got my bridle and I long for it muchly."

Miller, without speaking a word, took her roughly by the shoulder and almost threw her out of the room; threw her out bodily. She continued crying in the next room. It was a sorry way to treat an old woman I thought as I gathered the girl in my arms and carried her to the cart. It was all I could do to lift her up onto the seat beside me for Miller never offered any help; just stood watching, chewing tobacco, adding his filth to the already soiled earth. Just as I started off I turned to him and asked:

"What bridle was the old lady asking for?"

"You ask too many damned questions," he shouted, shaking his fist at me. "It's none of your business and some day you'll get a bullet in you if you don't learn to mind your own affairs. Take the wench

and travel. I don't want to ever see her again."

On the way home I stopped at the blacksmiths. William Jordan came to the door with more than usual interest in his kindly face.

"Will you do me a favor, Mr. Jordan? I have Aline Miller here. She is very sick. I brought her with me to prevent her father from beating her to death. I need a woman to nurse her. Will you ask your wife to come over and stay until she is out of danger—or dead?"

"The Miller girl? You are taking her into your home?"

"Yes."

"Listen to me, Doctor: Take my advice and keep on driving. Go to Walden and put her in the hospital. She is not the kind of woman you want in your house."

"I am afraid she is, Mr. Jordan. You see, I am going to marry her—if she lives."

My statement altered his attitude; immediately he became both dignified and solicitous.

"In that case I will go for my wife at once. She will not enjoy it but she will go. We will be right over."

For three hours Mrs. Jordan worked with the girl, bathing and oiling her with soothing unguents. Now and then I went in to give Aline a stimulant. She must have walked a long time for she was mud-stained from head to foot. After she was bathed clean and bedded between clean white sheets I went in to examine her; binding her feet and hands; washed out her mouth and painted the welts on her side and face.

Pneumonia developed and for a week Aline hovered between life and death. Mr. and Mrs. Jordan and a young doctor who loved her fought desperately for her life. At last the crisis came and she slept. In another week I was able to remove the bandages from her extremities. They had been horribly mistreated. They were seared in round, hard pads with many evenly spaced round spots as if made by some pointed instrument, such as an ice pick. On the outside of the hands and feet there were short, livid bruises directly corresponding to those smaller dots on the inside of the palms and soles.

One evening I called Jordan into my office and after closing the door I said:

"Mr. Jordan, I am going to ask a question about my future wife and I want an honest answer. When I brought her home her hands and feet were burned on the under part and had many holes in them. Have you any idea how she came by these injuries?"

"What kind of holes?" he countered.

"Small holes, from top to bottom, sort of like nail holes."

"How many?"

"Eight on each hand and foot."

"And the hands and feet were burned?"

"Yes. The burns were over a half-inch wide and curved, but the heels and wrists were unharmed. No holes there."

"What do you want to know?"

"How was she hurt?"

"How can I tell?"

"Have you any ideas?"

"Lots of them. Haven't you?"

I became irritated.

"Mr. Jordan, I asked you for help, not to play a game of mental chess."

"No doubt, but our psychology is different. If I told you what I think, you would send me to the Insane Hospital at North Walden. But do you remember the day Ethan Holt had me shoe his mare? Do you recall the bridle he had on her?"

"Certainly I remember."

"I never saw that bridle close," his eyes were dim and mysterious as he spoke, "but I always wanted to get it into my hands. If I knew more about that bridle we might discover the truth about the rest of it. I mean we might somehow find out whether we were right or wrong."

Unlocking a drawer of the desk I took out the bridle and handed it to him.

"There it is."

He looked at it intently; felt every part of it; smelt it carefully and returned it to me.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"It was on the mare the night she trampled Holt to death. I bought her for one-hundred dollars. The old man was going to kill her."

"And she got away from you?"

"Yes. I took off the bridle so she could drink from the trough and she got away. All I have for my hundred is the bridle."

"Have you any idea who had the bridle before Holt got it?"

"No—that is—not exactly," as memory stirred. "Now I remember—Granny Miller was asking about a bridle that she lost the morning I went for Aline."

"I thought so," said the blacksmith.

"Thought what?"

"Thought she had lost one. Now listen to me, Doctor: you are close to making a serious error by making the people of Lownsberry Corners think you will marry the Miller girl when she recovers. I am not going to advise you not to. All I am going to do is urge that you take this bridle to the man in charge of the Armor Room at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

"Let him tell you what he thinks. The Missus and I will care for the girl and perhaps when you do return you will have changed your mind about marrying the girl."

"That is all you will tell me?"

"That's all."

"But it will cost money to go to New York."

"It may cost you your soul if you stay here."

I left for New York that very night with the bridle wound round my body under my vest. In the morning I was talking to the Curator.

He spent the entire morning examining that bridle, speechless. He crumbled it in his hands; smelt of it; stretched it as far as his arms would reach; then he scraped it and put the scrapings under a microscope. I watched him carefully as he worked and when he finally returned the bridle to me I noticed that his hands shook violently.

"Where did you get it, Doctor Malverto?"

"It belonged to a family by the name of Miller."

"Tell me about it."

"Not a word until you tell me what you think of it."

"Here are the facts then. Not fanciful opinions; but facts. The leather is human skin; there is no possible doubt of it—the microscope proves it. It has been kept soft and pliable by the use of what I believe to be human fat. The bit is very old and seems to be of solid silver. So much for the facts."

"And how about the fancies?"

"That is different. Although I have never seen one, actually, only read of them and seen sketches of them, it looks to me like a very fine specimen of a witch's bridle."

"What do you mean?"

"It goes back to black magic and the Devil's Mass. A witch would take her bridle and throw it over a man's head, whereupon at its first touch, he would become a horse. She would ride him to the mass. When she was through with him off came the bridle, and the poor wretch would stumble home, muscle sore, hands and feet bruised and bleeding; tongue cut and lips raw from the gagbit."

"And I suppose the doctors thought he had suffered some form of epileptic convulsion?"

"No doubt."

"Do you really expect me to believe that?"

"I am not asking you to believe anything. I am only telling you what people believed, long ago. We will give you five-hundred dollars for that piece if you wish to sell, Doctor Malverto."

"Thanks, but I think not. But I will tell you the story."

AND SO I told him beginning with the illness of Ethan Holt; how he had come into possession of a beautiful new mare and had met his death by her hooves; how I bought and lost her within the hour after purchase. But I did not tell him about the little woman, slowly drifting back to healthy youth. No. It was best that he should not know about her; about her hands and feet; that she was in my home. I merely thanked him and left, taking the bridle with me.

Now I knew the whole story; that time I had been called to attend Ethan he had been hag-ridden to the meeting of the Devil and his followers. Somehow he had discovered what had happened to him. Perhaps the vainglorious girl had bragged and twitted him about it and the next time she had tried to slip the bridle on him he had been too quick and strong and the harness had been strapped on her head instead of his. Then he shod her, determined to tame her, even if it killed him in the taming. But she would not tame and had killed him. I had released her from the spell when I removed the bridle at the watering trough. But there remained the marks.

So I returned to Lownsberry Corners and found Aline greatly improved. I locked the bridle in the drawer again and going into her room shut the door and sat by her bed.

"Aline, you know that I am going to marry you and try to make you a happy, respected woman. But before we get married I would like you to be baptised. Then you will belong to God instead of the Devil. You will give up your former life and live as a Christian woman should live with her husband."

She greeted my statements with laughter. Again and again she laughed as she kissed me. That first kiss drove me frantic with the sweetness of it.

"No," she whispered. "You come with me, to the meeting. It will be soon, now, when the moon is full. I will show you something then that will put all thoughts of God and marriage out of your mind. You can have me there, but I will never, never, be your wife. Bah! And be baptised! Never! Never! But you give me back the bridle. We will bit the blacksmith. He is big enough for the two of us to ride him, and how I will enjoy it! To sit close to you on such a stallion and gall him with bit and spur! You should have seen me spur the fitting fool!"

I held her close to me, raining kisses on her lips, eyes, hair and her slender, alabaster-like neck.

"No! No! You are going to marry me," I cried.

"Never!" she replied, pushing me from her. "I would sooner have married Ethan."

I left her then and told the blacksmith and his wife that they might go home, for I was taking her to Walden to some friends of mine. Then I spent the rest of the day strengthening the box stall with heavy planks. The next day I told Jordan I had decided not to marry Aline and he shook my hand and congratulated me on my wisdom.

The evening after the Jordans left, the air was cold, with a light frost, and clear. The stars were unusually bright as though they were intent on lighting the whole of the Corners. I wrapped a blanket around my love and carried her, wondering and protesting, out to the stable. I laid her gently on the clean straw which thickly

bedded the stall. I held her firmly there as I gave her a last chance to reconsider and become a decent, Christian wife. In reply she spat on me, whereupon I drew the bridle from my pocket, and only then did she realize what I had in mind and she began fighting, writhing and biting. For all my strength, and except for her illness, she would have won out had I not placed a silver cross on her lips, whereupon she fainted. I slipped the bridle on, put the gagbit in her mouth. Just in time I jumped out of the box stall and padlocked the door.

Three days later I took the blacksmith out to the stable.

"You got the mare back?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, I found her again."

"Where's the Miller girl?"

"I told you I was sending her to Walden."

"So you did. Is that the bridle the mare had on the night you bought her? The one you took to New York City?"

"The same."

He entered the stall, gentling her, took the mare's hooves, one at a time in his hands to examine them.

"Was she still shod when you bought her from old man Holt?"

"I am sure she was."

"Shod when you watered her?"

"Certainly."

"Well, all I can say is that when she got away from you she slipped her shoes; but the nail marks are still there. And her hooves are still burned where I fitted those red-hot shoes on her."

"You are sure this is the mare you shod for Ethan?"

"Positive. I know my own work."

"How many nails to each shoe?"

"Eight. And that reminds me—"

"I know what you are thinking," I said, "and may I suggest that you stop thinking?"

He came out of the stall and shut the door.

"This is the Devil's work, my boy. Take the advice of an older man and put a bullet between her eyes, and better still, make it a silver bullet with a cross on its nose. Then come to church and be an example for righteous people."

"No," I said, "I am going to keep the mare and tame her."

Now, during the days, I drive one horse and try to make a living. But at night I go into the box stall and try to tame a wild mare. At times she will let me put my arms around her neck and kiss her on the forehead between the eyes, where the silver star is. At other times she fights furiously and tries her best to get me under foot so she can trample me as she did the fitting fool.

But I am determined to conquer her. When I do I will again remove the bridle; she will be willing to be baptised and marry me, becoming a gentle, loving wife, and faithful.

Of course, I realize that she may kill me first, in an unguarded moment, kissing my body to death with blows from her hardened hooves. But come what may, I must have her with me, woman or mare, because I love her.

We traversed many vaults in which mouldy bones and verdigris-eaten sarcophagi were piled about the walls . . ."

Who Are the Living?

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Behind his words hovered a legion of dark images. And the stoop of his shoulders seemed to bear a burden of centuries through which no man could conceivably have lived!

I FIND it peculiarly difficult to express the exact nature of the sentiment which Tomeron had always evoked in me. However, I am sure that the feeling never partook, at any time, of what is ordinarily known as friendship. It was a compound of unusual esthetic and intellectual elements, and was somehow

closely allied in my thoughts with the same fascination that has drawn me ever since childhood toward all things that are remote in space and time, or which have about them the irresolvable twilight of antiquity. Somehow, Tomeron seemed never to belong to the present; but one could readily have imagined him as living in some bygone age. About him, there was nothing whatever of the lineaments of our own period; and he even went so far as to affect in his costume an approximation to the garments worn several centuries ago. His complexion was extremely pale and cadaverous, and he stooped heavily from poring over ancient tomes and no less ancient maps. He moved always with the slow, meditative pace of one who dwells among far-off memories and reveries; and he spoke often of people and events and ideas that have long since been forgotten. For the most part, he was apparently unheedful of present things, and I felt that for him the huge city of Ptolemides, in which we both dwelt, with all its manifold clamor and tumult, was little more than a labyrinth of painted vapors. There was a like vagueness in the attitude of others toward Tomeron; and though he had always been accepted without question as a representative of the noble and otherwise extinct family from whom he claimed descent, nothing appeared to be known about his actual birth and antecedents. With two servants who were both deaf-mutes, who were very old and who likewise wore the raiment of a former age, he lived in the semi-ruinous mansion of his ancestors, where, it was said, none of the family had dwelt for many generations. There he pursued the occult and recondite studies that were so congenial to his mind; and there, at certain intervals, I was wont to visit him.

I cannot recall the precise date and circumstances of the beginning of my acquaintance with Tomeron. Though I come of a hardy line that is noted for the sanity of its constitution, my faculties have been woefully shaken by the horror of the happening with which that acquaintance ended. My memory is not what it was, and there are certain lacunae for which my readers must contrive to forgive me. The only wonder is, that my powers of recollection have survived at all, beneath the hideous burden they have had to bear; for, in a more than metaphoric sense, I have been as one condemned to carry with him, at all times and in all places, the loathsome incubi of things long dead and corrupt.

I can readily recall, however, the studies to which Tomeron had devoted himself, the lost demonian volumes from Hyperborea and Mu and Atlantis with which his library shelves were heaped to the ceiling, and the queer charts, not of any land that lies above the surface of the earth, on which he pored by perpetual candle-light. I shall not speak of these studies, for they would seem too fantastic and too macabre for credibility; and that which I have to relate is incredible enough in itself. I shall speak, however, of certain strange ideas with which Tomeron was much preoccupied, and concerning which he so often discoursed to me in that deep, guttural and monotonous voice of his, that had the reverberation of unsounded caverns in its tones and cadences. He maintained that life and death were not the fixed conditions that people commonly believed them to be; that the two realms were often intermingled in ways not readily discerned, and had penumbral border-lands; that the dead were not always the dead, nor the living the living, as such terms are habitually understood. But the manner in which he spoke of these ideas was extremely vague and general; and I could never induce him to specify his meaning or to proffer some concrete illustration that would render it more intelligible to a mentality such as mine, that was unused to dealing in the

cobwebs of abstraction. Behind his words, there hovered, or seemed to hover, a legion of dark, amorphous images that I could never formulate or depict to myself in any way, until the final denouement of our descent into the catacombs of Ptolemides.

I HAVE already said that my feeling for Tomeron was never anything that could be classified as friendship. But even from the first, I was well aware that Tomeron had a curious fondness for me—a fondness whose nature I could not comprehend, and with which I could hardly even sympathize. Though he fascinated me at all times, there were occasions when my interest was not unalloyed with an actual sense of repulsion. At whiles, his pallor was *too* cadaverous, too suggestive of fungi that have grown in the dark, or of leprous bones by moonlight; and the stoop of his shoulders conveyed to my brain the idea that they bore a burden of centuries through which no man could conceivably have lived. He aroused always a certain awe in me; and the awe was sometimes mingled with an indeterminate fear.

I do not remember how long our acquaintance had continued; but I do remember that he spoke with increasing frequency, toward the end, of those bizarre ideas at which I have hinted. Always I felt that he was troubled about something, for he often looked at me with a mournful gleam in his hollow eyes; and sometimes he would speak, with peculiar stress, of the great regard that he had for me. And one night he said:

"Theolus, the time is coming when you must know the truth—must know me as I am, and not as I have been permitted to seem. There is a term to all things, and all things are obedient to inexorable laws. I would that it were otherwise, but neither I nor any man, among the living or among the dead, can lengthen at will the term of any state or condition of being, or alter the laws that decree such conditions."

Perhaps it was well that I did not understand him, and that I was unable to attach much importance to his words or to the singular intentness of his bearing as he uttered them. For a few more days, I was spared the knowledge which I now carry. Then, one evening, Tomeron spoke thus:

"I am now compelled to ask an odd favor of you, which I hope you will grant me, in consideration of our long friendship. The favor is, that you accompany me this very night to those vaults of my family which lie in the catacombs of Ptolemides."

Though much surprised by the request, and not altogether pleased, I was nevertheless unable to deny him. I could not imagine the purpose of such a visit as the one proposed; but, as was my wont, I forbore to interrogate Tomeron, and merely told him that I would accompany him to the vaults if such were his desire.

"I thank you, Theolus, for this proof of friendship," he replied earnestly. "Believe me, I am loath to ask it; but there has been a certain deception, an odd misunderstanding which cannot go on any longer. Tonight, you will learn the truth."

Carrying torches, we left the mansion of Tomeron and sought the ancient catacombs of Ptolemides, which lie beyond the walls and have long been disused, for there is now a fine necropolis in the very heart of the city. The moon had gone down beyond the desert that encroaches toward the catacombs; and we were forced to light our torches long before we came to the subterranean adits; for the rays of Mars and Jupiter in a sodden and funereal sky were not enough to illumine the perilous path we followed among mounds and fallen obelisks and broken graves. At length we discovered the dark and weed-choked en-

trance of the charnels; and here Tomeron led the way with a swiftness and surety of footing that bespoke long familiarity with the place.

Entering, we found ourselves in a crumbling passage where the bones of dilapidated skeletons were scattered amid the rubble that had fallen from the sides and roof.

A choking stench of stagnant air and age-old corruption made me pause for an instant; but Tomeron scarcely appeared to perceive it, for he strode onward, lifting his torch and beckoning me to follow. We traversed many vaults in which mouldy bones and verdigris-eaten sarcophagi were piled about the walls or strewn where desecrating thieves had left them in bygone years. The air was increasingly dank, chill and miasmal; and mephitic shadows crouched or swayed before our torches in every niche and corner. Also, as we went onward, the walls became more ruinous and the bones we saw on every hand were greener with the mould of time.

At length we rounded a sudden angle of the low cavern we were following. Here we came to vaults that evidently belonged to some noble family, for they were quite spacious and there was but one sarcophagus in each vault.

"My ancestors and my family lie here," announced Tomeron.

We reached the cavern's end and were confronted by a blank wall. At one side, was the final vault, in which an empty sarcophagus stood open. The sarcophagus was wrought of the finest bronze and was richly carven.

Tomeron paused before the vault and turned to me. By the flickering, uncertain light I thought that I saw a look of strange and unaccountable distress on his features.

"I must beg you to withdraw for a moment," he said, in a low and sorrowful voice. "Afterwards, you can return."

SURPRISED and puzzled, I obeyed his request and went slowly back along the passage for some distance. Then I returned to the place where I had left him. My surprise was heightened when I found that he had extinguished his torch and had dropped it on the threshold of the final vault. And Tomeron himself was not visible anywhere.

Entering the vault, since there was seemingly no other place where he could have hidden himself, I looked about for him, but the room was empty. At least, I thought it empty till I looked again at the richly carven sarcophagus and saw that it was now tenanted, for a cadaver lay within, shrouded in a winding-sheet of a sort that has not been used for centuries in Ptolemides.

I drew near to the sarcophagus, and peering into the face of the cadaver, I saw that it bore a fearful and strange resemblance to the face of Tomeron, though it was bloated and puffed with the adipocere of death and was purple with the shadows of decay. And looking again, I saw that it was indeed Tomeron.

I would have screamed aloud with horror that came upon me; but my lips were benumbled and frozen, and I could only whisper Tomeron's name. But as I whispered it, the lips of the cadaver seemed to part, and the tip of its tongue protruded between them. And I thought that the tip trembled, as if Tomeron were about to speak and answer me. But gazing more closely, I saw that the trembling was merely the movement of worms as they twisted up and down and to and fro and sought to crowd each other from Tomeron's tongue.

Herbert West: Reanimator

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Presenting the third chill-filled episode in this series about the young man who seeks to conquer the world's most ancient enemy!

III. Six Shots by Moonlight

IT IS uncommon to fire all six shots of a revolver with great suddenness when one would probably be sufficient, but many things in the life of Herbert West were uncommon. It is, for instance, not often that a young physician leaving college is obliged to conceal the principles which guide his selection of a home and office, yet that was the case with Herbert West. When he and I obtained

Madly, ceaselessly, West experimented to find something that would start man's vital motions anew after they had been stopped by . . . *Death!*

our degrees at the medical school of Miskatonic University, and sought to relieve our poverty by setting up as general practitioners, we took great care not to say that we chose our house because it was fairly well isolated, and as near as possible to the potter's field.

Reticence such as this is seldom without a cause, nor indeed was ours; for our requirements were those resulting from a lifework distinctly unpopular. Outwardly we were doctors only, but beneath the surface were aims of far greater and more terrible moment—for the essence of Herbert West's existence was a quest amid black and forbidden realms of the unknown, in which he hoped to uncover the secret of life and restore to perpetual animation the graveyard's cold clay. Such a quest demands strange materials, among them fresh human bodies; and in order to keep supplied with these indispensable things one must live quietly and not far from a place of informal interment.

West and I had met in college, and I had been the only one to sympathize with his hideous experiments. Gradually I had come to be his inseparable assistant, and now that we were out of college we had to keep together. It was not easy to find a good opening for two doctors in company, but finally the influence of the university secured us a practice in Bolton—a factory town near Arkham, the seat of the college. The Bolton Worsted Mills are the largest in the Miskatonic Valley, and their polyglot employees are never popular as patients with the local physicians. We chose our house with the greatest care, seizing at last on a rather run-down cottage near the end of Pond Street; five numbers from the closest neighbor, and separated from the local potter's field by only a stretch of meadow land, bisected by a narrow neck of the rather dense forest which lies to the north. The distance was greater than we wished, but we could get no nearer house without going on the other side of the field, wholly out of the factory district. We were not much displeased, however, since there were no people between us and our sinister source of supplies. The walk was a trifle long, but we could haul our silent specimens undisturbed.

OUR practice was surprisingly large from the very first—large enough to please most young doctors, and large enough to prove a bore and a burden to students whose real interest lay elsewhere. The mill-hands were of somewhat turbulent inclinations; and besides their many natural needs, their frequent clashes and stabbing affrays gave us plenty to do. But what actually absorbed our minds was the secret laboratory we had fitted up in the cellar—the laboratory with the long table under the electric lights, where in the small hours of the morning we often injected West's various solutions into the veins of the things we dragged from the potter's field. West was experimenting madly to find something which would start man's vital motions anew after they had been stopped by the thing we call death, but had encountered the most ghastly obstacles. The solution had to be differently compounded for different types—what would serve for guinea-pigs would not serve for human beings, and different human specimens required large modifications.

The bodies had to be exceedingly fresh, or the slight decomposition of brain tissue would render perfect reanimation impossible. Indeed, the greatest problem was to get them fresh enough—West had had horrible experiences during his secret college researches with corpses of doubtful vintage. The results of partial or imperfect animation were much more hideous than were the total failures, and we both held fearsome recollections of such things. Ever

since our first demoniac session in the deserted farmhouse on Meadow Hill in Arkham, we had felt a brooding menace; and West, though a calm, blond, blue-eyed scientific automaton in most respects, often confessed to a shuddering sensation of stealthy pursuit. He half felt that he was followed — a psychological delusion of shaken nerves, enhanced by the undeniably disturbing fact that at least one of our reanimated specimens was still alive — a frightful carnivorous thing in a padded cell at Sefton. Then there was another—our first—whose exact fate we had never learned.

We had fair luck with specimens in Bolton—much better than in Arkham. We had not been settled a week before we got an accident victim on the very night of burial, and made it open its eyes with an amazingly rational expression before the solution failed. It had lost an arm—if it had been a perfect body we might have succeeded better. Between then and the next January we secured three more, one total failure, one case of marked muscular motion, and one rather shivery thing—it rose of itself and uttered a sound. Then came a period when luck was poor; interments fell off, and those that did occur were of specimens either too diseased or too maimed for use. We kept track of all the deaths and their circumstances with systematic care.

One March night, however, we unexpectedly obtained a specimen which did not come from the potter's field. In Bolton the prevailing spirit of Puritanism had outlawed the sport of boxing—with the usual result. Surreptitious and ill-conducted bouts among the mill-workers were common, and occasionally professional talent of low grade was imported. This late winter night there had been such a match; evidently with disastrous results, since two timorous Poles had come to us with incoherently whispered entreaties to attend to a very secret and desperate case. We followed them to an abandoned barn, where the remnants of a crowd of frightened foreigners were watching a silent black form on the floor.

The match had been between Kid O'Brien — a lubberly and now quaking youth with a most un-Hibernian hooked nose—and Buck Robinson, "The Harlem Smoke." The Negro had been knocked out, and a moment's examination showed us that he would permanently remain so. He was a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms which I could not help calling fore-legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eery moon. The body must have looked even worse in life—but the world holds many ugly things. Fear was upon the whole pitiful crowd, for they did not know what the law would exact of them if the affair were not hushed up; and they were very grateful when West, in spite of my involuntary shudders, offered to get rid of the thing quietly—for a purpose I knew too well.

There was bright moonlight over the snowless landscape, but we dressed the thing and carried it home between us through the deserted streets and meadows, as we had carried a similar thing one horrible night in Arkham. We approached the house from the field in the rear, took the specimen in the back door and down the cellar stairs, and prepared it for the usual experiment. Our fear of the police was absurdly great, though we had timed our trip to avoid the solitary patrolman of that section.

THE result was wearily anticlimactic. Ghastly as our prize appeared, it was wholly unresponsive to every solution we injected in its black arm; solutions prepared from experience with white specimens only. So as the hour grew danger-

ously near to dawn, we did as we had done with the others—dragged the thing across the meadows to the neck of woods near the potter's field, and buried it there in the best sort of grave the frozen ground would furnish. The grave was not very deep, but fully as good as that of the previous specimen—the thing which had risen of itself and uttered a sound. In the light of our dark lanterns we carefully covered it with leaves and dead vines, fairly certain that the police would never find it in a forest so dim and dense.

The next day I was increasingly apprehensive about the police, for a patient brought rumors of a suspected fight and death. West had still another source of worry, for he had been called in the afternoon to a case which ended very threateningly. An Italian woman had become hysterical over her missing child—a lad of five who had strayed off early in the morning and failed to appear for dinner—and had developed symptoms highly alarming in view of an always weak heart. It was a very foolish hysteria, for the boy had often run away before; but Italian peasants are exceedingly superstitious, and this woman seemed as much harassed by omens as by facts. About seven o'clock in the evening she had died, and her frantic husband had made a frightful scene in his efforts to kill West, whom he wildly blamed for not saving her life. Friends had held him when he drew a stiletto, but West departed amidst his inhuman shrieks, curses, and oaths of vengeance. In his latest affliction the fellow seemed to have forgotten his child, who was still missing as the night advanced. There was some talk of searching the woods, but most of the family's friends were busy with the dead woman and the screaming man. Altogether, the nervous strain upon West must have been tremendous. Thoughts of the police and of the mad Italian both weighed heavily.

We retired about eleven, but I did not sleep well. It might mean the end of all our local work—and perhaps prison for both West and me. I did not like those rumors of a fight which were floating about. After the clock had struck three the moon shone in my eyes, but I turned over without rising to pull down the shade. Then came the steady rattling at the back door.

I lay still and somewhat dazed, but before long heard West's rap on my door. He was clad in dressing-gown and slippers, and had in his hands a revolver and an electric flashlight. From the revolver I knew that he was thinking more of the crazed Italian than of the police.

"We'd better both go," he whispered. "It wouldn't do not to answer it anyway, and it may be a patient—it would be like one of those fools to try the back door."

So we both went down the stairs on tiptoe, with a fear partly justified and partly that which comes only from the soul of the weird small hours. The rattling continued, growing somewhat louder. When we reached the door I cautiously unbolted it and threw it open, and as the moon streamed revealingly down on the form silhouetted there, West did a peculiar thing. Despite the obvious danger of attracting notice and bringing down on our heads the dreaded police investigation—a thing which after all was mercifully averted by the relative isolation of our cottage—my friend suddenly, excitedly, and unnecessarily emptied all six chambers of his revolver into the nocturnal visitor.

For that visitor was neither Italian nor policeman. Looming hideously against the spectral moon was a gigantic misshapen thing not to be imagined save in nightmares—a glassy-eyed, ink-black apparition nearly on all fours, covered with bits of mould, leaves, and vines, foul with caked blood, and having between its glistening teeth a snow-white, terrible, cylindrical object terminating in a tiny hand.

Visibility: Zero

By ***NELSON S. BOND***

He was a professor. He was also a large chunk of nothing, in the middle of Zero, surrounded by vacancy . .

EVERYTHING happens to me. I had just lifted my size twelves to the surface of my cigarette-scalloped desk, leaned back in my swivel and settled down for forty restful winks on *Times-Star* time when trouble, masquerading under the guise of Joe Muldoon, punctured my privacy.

"Sam," fussed the demon cameraman of our daily news-views-and-scandal sheet, "there's *things* goin' on around here this mornin'."

I said, "Look, useless, let's you and me play games? You let on you're a Fuller Brush man and I'll play like I'm a housewife. You go out and knock on the door and I'll say I'm not home. Things? Of course things are happening. All over the world. That's how extras are born."

"Not," persisted Muldoon fretfully, "odd things like these. My toe got stepped on in the elevator, only I was all alone there. Somebody asked Bob Branyan where was the office of the editor, and when he looked up he didn't see nobody. I seen a newspaper pick itself up and turn a couple of pages by itself—"

"A bromo," I told him, "and a glass of tomato juice. That's what you need. You shouldn't drink that stuff, sonny. You'll be seeing purple kangaroos next. Yes? What is it?"

A timid, fluttering rap had sounded on my door. Now the door slipped open a few inches, hesitantly, wavered there as if uncertain whether to open or close, then

shut again. I looked at Muldoon questioningly; he shook his head.

"See what I mean, Sam? *Screwey* things!"

I went to the door, flung it open. There was no one in sight. The City Room was as empty as a schoolmarm's hope-chest. I slammed the door again angrily. I said, "Now, look here, Muldoon—if this is your idea of a joke—"

"It—er—it isn't a joke, Mr. Gordon," said a soft little voice, almost at my ear. "Oh, not at all! It's very, very serious!"

I spun wildly. "Who said that?" I demanded.

Joe Muldoon had collapsed weakly into my chair.

"N—not me!" he croaked. "Don't look at me. I heard it too. But I didn't do it."

"That's right," said the quiet voice at my shoulder. "It wasn't your friend who spoke, Mr. Gordon. It was I."

THIS time as I swung around I grabbed. For a moment my fingers brushed—or I thought they did—cloth. Then the sensation faded, and I was clutching a handful of ozone. In a reproachful tone the voice piped, "Oh, now, *really!* Do you think that was nice, Mr. Gordon?"

"The—the Shadow!" bleated Joe, wilting like a leaf of yesterday's lettuce. "He's cast a hypnotic spell over our minds, blindin' us—"

"Stuff," snapped our unseen guest, "and nonsense! I am Dr. Willoughby T. Smerk, professor of abstract mathematics at Eastern University. I have come here solely and simply to offer you a practical demonstration of my latest discovery—achievement of that long-sought phenomenon: invisibility!"

"Invis—" I gasped. "Invis—!"

"Apparently," snapped the unseeable Professor Smerk, "it confuses you to converse with an optical illusion? Here! Put these on!"

BEFORE me, out of thin air, dangling on nothingness, emerged a pair of spectacles. Ordinary looking things. In a daze, I hooked them over my ears. And instantly I was gazing at the solid figure of my visitor.

He was a strange little guy, Dr. Smerk. Hardly more than five-foot-four; a colorless drab of a man with pale eyes and straw-hued tufts of hair surrounding a central plateau of baldness like downy mountains overlooking a desert. But nervous! You never saw such a fidgety-widget in your life! His long, slim hands and tiny feet were constantly in motion; his feet shuffled from side to side like those of a hepcat on hot nails; his hands forever fretfully fingered his lapels, pawed his thatch of hair, darted from pocket to pocket like anxious hummingbirds.

I removed the glasses. Immediately Dr. Smerk disappeared. All I could see was a large chunk of nothing, in the middle of zero, surrounded by vacancy.

Joe was staring at me, his eyeballs on stalks. "Did you—did you see him, Sam?" he whispered hoarsely. I nodded and handed him the glasses. As he adjusted them on his nose, to Dr. Smerk I said:

"I don't understand, sir, and I won't pretend I can. But you *are* invisible. How did you do it?"

What expression overspread the little man's features I wouldn't know, since Joe had the spectacles. But there was pleasure and gratification in his voice as he answered.

"Absorption, of course. The 'taking into myself' of all light-waves. You understand, naturally, that objects are visible because of their color, which, in turn, is the result of light-wave reflection? For example, when you see a yellow leaf, what color is that leaf?"

"Why—why, yellow," I stammered.

"Ah, no! Quite the opposite! It is every color *but* yellow! The leaf, through

some photokinetic quality inherent to its nature, has absorbed the blues, the reds, the violets, all the light-wave radiations impinging on it save that which causes the color we know as 'yellow.'

"This yellow is rejected, not absorbed, reflected to us—and we see it as the leaf's 'natural' color. As you can plainly see, the poet spoke more truly than even he knew when he wrote, 'Things are not what they seem'."

Joe took the glasses off to mop his brow, stared incredulously for a moment at talking space, and replaced them. "You mean whatever color a thing is, it *ain't?*"

"An unscientific," nodded Dr. Smerk, "but completely accurate way of putting it. From that starting point I began my experiments. I shall not bore you with a tale of my years of labor. Nor would you understand the chain of reasoning on which my efforts depended.

"Suffice it to say that a few days ago my toil found its reward. A certain compound—a mixture in the form of an unguent—which renders invisible to the human eye all things upon which it has been spread. Thus neither I, having bathed in the solution, nor my garments, which have been dipped, can be seen by you."

I LICKED my lips which needed more moisture than my kapok-coated tongue could supply them. I said, "But how come you came *here,* Professor?"

"This is a newspaper office, is it not? Surely this discovery should interest your readers?"

"It," I told him frankly, "would wow em! This yarn is worth a million bucks, plus sales tax. And as a newspaper man, maybe I'm crazy to even gaze a gift nag in the larynx—but aren't you forgetting something, Doc? This country is at war. And this invention of yours presents a war weapon every nation on earth would give its broken treaties to possess! I think the proper place for you to project your spectral image is the office of Uncle Sam, c/o Washington, D. C."

A wistful sigh, the more melancholy because it was a ghostly one, answered me.

"I *did* go to Washington, Mr. Gordon. I—I couldn't get anyone to pay any attention to me. I fear I'm not a very aggressive man; at any rate, I couldn't make my listeners understand the nature of my discovery. Invisible, I could capture no one's attention; they thought I was speaking over the public-address system. When I approached them in the flesh I was shunted from the War Department to the Patent Office, the Patent Office to the Federal Communications Board, from there to—"

Well, I didn't need a blueprint to understand how it was. Even in peacetime you need a mowing machine to cut your way through the Washington red-tape-worms. I said, "But we've got to convince 'em somehow, Doc. This is too big a thing —Oh, hello, Boss!"

MY CHIEF, the City Editor of ye dear old *Times-Star,* had bumbled in with a scowl on his pan which looked as though it had been tattooed there in infancy. Now he glowered at me like Joe Louis eyeing another Bum-of-the-Month.

"Well, Gordon!" he rasped, "what's ailing *you?* Been sopping up all the local tap-rooms again? Who're you talking to?"

I said, "Listen, Boss, this is terrific! Dr. Smerk, here—"

"Dr. Who, *where?*" He glared around the room, then at me savagely. "So I was right, eh? Well, hangover or not, this is a newspaper. We have work to do. I want you to take Muldoon and light out for Westchester. There's big doings up there this afternoon. The army is exhibiting some new gadget for defense, and—"

"Who, me?" I gasped. "Hey, now, wait a minute! I'm supposed to be the Assistant City Editor of this rag!"

The Great Stone Heart skewered me with a glance.

"Meaning," he demanded, "which?"

"Meaning," I squawked, "you can't assign me to a job like this. It's bad enough I should get underpaid every week for doing my regular work, without I should also carry on for the leg men. I'm no reporter, I'm a—"

"You're a dead duck," informed the boss, "unless you get going on this assignment—and fast! I've taken all I'll stand from you, Gordon. We're short-handed, sweetheart. And now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their newspaper—or else! Here!" He took a scrap of paper out of his pocket, hurled it in my general direction. "This pass'll admit you and Muldoon to Fort Slocum. Get the inside on this new thingamajigger, whatever it is. And play it up big. The public is simply swooning for bigger and better war news."

I didn't like it a bit. I was just getting ready to stick my neck out for the axe when a soft whisper close to my ear silenced me.

"Mr. Gordon—you said you'd help me. Maybe this is the chance we've been looking for."

I calmed like a Firster on M-Day. Of course the wee man was right. If we could let him demonstrate his discovery to actual, practical, hard-headed army officers of the staff, rather than waffle-tailed theoreticians, something might come of it. Still, I wasn't sure how long Dr. Smerk's invisibility might last. It was best to be prepared.

I said, "We-e-ell, all right, Chief. But I've got a friend—a Dr. Smerk—who'd like to come along with us. Can you fix the pass up for three instead of two?"

The boss glared at me disgustedly. "I cannot! This is important stuff, Gordon; you can't finagle any more passes for your crackpot pals. That pass admits two, and two of you is all that will get into Fort Slocum this afternoon!"

Joe Muldoon, grinning like a gargoyle, silently took off the Doc's glasses.

"You wouldn't," he asked interestedly, "like to make book on that, would you, Chief?"

WELL, the boss was right about one thing. The shindig out at Fort Slocum that afternoon *was* big. In fact, they were being so frightfully hush-hush about everything that the gates were stuffed like a Christmas turkey with newspapermen, all wearing looks of baffled desperation on their pans.

We started to shoulder through the mob, and I bumped into Bunny O'Doul, one of the keenest newshawks who ever rang up a beat. Bunny gave me a glance that would sour butter.

"Hyah, Sam. So *you* wasted the afternoon, too?"

"Come again?" I queried.

He shook his head discouragedly. "You might as well come on back to New York with the rest of us. This camp's as hard to crash as an autogyro."

I slipped him my Grade AA superior smile. "For some of you jerks, maybe. But I've got a pass."

"Swell!" snorted Bunny. "And what did you think the rest of us were trying to force our way in with: old hatcheck stubs? Passes are dime a dozen around here, chum? There are enough of them in this crowd to paper a wall. And that's all they *are* good for."

I saw what he meant. Everybody was gathered outside the gate; no one was getting through. I spotted the *Life* man and Bob Downey from the *Herald-Trib.* guys from the INS, NANA, AP—all the big syndicates.

There were radio men there from all the major networks, loaded to the Plimsoll mark with pack transmitters, but

they weren't getting in, either. It looked like a hopeless case.

Still, we couldn't go back without making a try. So I pushed my way forward to the sentry, and handed him my slip of paper. He shook his head.

"Sorry, friend. This ticket's no good today."

I said, "You mean *nobody* can get in?"

"Not without the password. This is a sneak preview. The public pre-meer ain't for a couple of months yet, or till Mr. Shicklgruber sees it. You ain't got the word, eh? Well, in that case—"

His bayonet tickled the third button of my vest, and I gave ground. But just as I was about to sound the retreat, there came a tiny, familiar whisper in my ear.

"*'Remember Pearl Harbor!'*, Mr. Gordon!"

I said, "Huh? What's that got to do with—" Then, as the sentry looked at me suspiciously, I caught on. I bent forward and relayed the rallying-cry. The guard straightened suddenly, squared his rifle to respectful present arms.

"Very good, sir! You'll forgive my caution, I know. We must be very careful. You may enter."

Muldoon looked bewildered. "W-what's going on, Sam? Where in hell did *you* get the pass—?"

But I drowned out his query with a hearty bellow.

"Ah, yes, soldier! I quite understand. Thank you!" Then, as we strode through the gate, followed by green-irised glares from our thwarted colleagues, "Nice going, Smerky, old boy! And you, Joe, shove a clamp on that trap of yours. The Doc got the word for us."

SO THAT'S how we got into Fort Slocum. And, boy, we were really into something when we got in there, what I mean! We found our way down to the proving ground where the new and secret gadget was to be unveiled. We didn't need a guide: we located the spot by its glitter. A glance advised us who the guests of the government were on this special occasion. They were high military representatives from the U. S. A.'s sister American republics. From Mexico, the Argentine, Brazil, Peru and Chile — from all over Central and South America, and from the independent islands, the Latins had come to Manhattan.

And what a sight they were, all dolled up in martial finery! There hasn't been such a sartorial splendiferousness since Earl Carroll designed uniforms for the New Jersey state cops. White uniforms and blue, bright green and ultramarine, gold medals glinting and flashing in the sunlight. Every man present seemed to be at least a brigadier-general. Shoulders were festooned with more stars than Hennessey. In that crowd I felt as drab as a wren in a garden of peacocks. Of the entire assemblage, only one other beside ourselves wore civilian clothes: the official interpreter. Through him the U. S. Army spokesman addressed the group.

It was a rather tedious business. Everything had to be given the once-over-lightly in three languages—English, Spanish and Portuguese. But to clip a long story trim, what the army ordnance officer told them was this:

They had been called together to witness a test of a new concoction called *pyrodine*. This was the most destructive explosive so far discovered by science. For the present, the United States intended to keep its formula a secret. But all present were assured that in case of need, supplies would be made available instantly to all Western Hemisphere friends and allies.

The speaker then whipped the cover from a small rack beside him, exposing, in a tiny, well-padded container, about a dozen vials the size of a test-tube, filled with a grayish-blue powder. These vials,

he said, contained pyrodine. Now, to demonstrate its efficiency as contrasted with TNT—

Two sweating soldiers lugged a box of trinitrotoluene out into the center of the cleared proving ground. There it was detonated. The blast, of course, was deafening. Dirt mushroomed skyward and everyone nodded gravely. Into my ear, Dr. Smerk whispered nervously, "Oh, gracious, isn't it awful, Mr. Gordon?"

But I was watching with great interest Act II of the little drama. For now, at the U. S. Army officer's command, one soldier was gingerly carrying out onto the field a single container of the new compound. Then we were all requested to withdraw to a spot more than twice as far from the pyrodine as we had been from the TNT. A sharpshooter was selected; he drew bead on the distant vial, pressed the trigger.

EVEN though we had been warned, it came like the blow of a sledgehammer. A terrific explosion that gouged a crater violently out of the face of Mama Earth. Dirt, rocks, shale, splashed heavenward in a crash of ear-splitting thunder. The ground trembled and shook. I made a one-point landing on my puss, and I wasn't the only nose-diving witness. Olive faces emitted gasps of incredulity. Snapping black eyes stared at the tremendous chasm yawning before us.

Then all bedlam broke loose. The envoys from south-of-the-border had come, had seen, and were conquered. Latins are an emotional lot. They burst into a voluble frenzy of excitement. Through the sprinkle of dust still swirling down upon us they rushed to the army officer's side, shook his hand and pounded his shoulders, embraced him, gesticulated. It was a veritable love-feast of hemisphere solidarity. Muldoon, in his element at last, was happily grabbing shots of the *agapo* for tomorrow's front page. And then—

And then an invisible hand was plucking anxiously at my sleeve. And Dr. Smerk was piping, "Mr. Gordon! I—"

"Go 'way!" I snapped at him. "Let me alone, Smerky. This is tremendous! I'll take care of you later. Right now, I've got to talk to that officer."

"But, Mr. Gordon—"

"Amscray, will you?"

"But, Mr. Gordon, this is important! I saw—"

"Sure," I told him annoyedly. "You saw fireworks—I saw fireworks. All God's chillun saw fireworks. Please go somewhere and bag your unseeable head for a minute, huh?"

A small, tense, invisible hand twisted me around. A shrill voice cried in pure exasperation, "Mr. Gordon! You've got to listen! This is *terrible*. In the excitement just now a spy of a hostile power stole one of the vials of pyrodine!"

"Okay," I said. "Okay. That's very nice, isn't it? Now, go 'way and—" Then the double-take struck me; my eyes bulged like a lady bowler in slacks. *"Wha-a-at!* Did you say somebody stole—?"

"Oh, hush, Mr. Gordon!" warned Smerk nervously. "Be careful! Someone may hear you!"

"Damn!" said Joe Muldoon suddenly. "Oh, damn me for a clumsy lunk. Look what I just went and done, Sam—"

"Later!" I cried. I grabbed at Smerk's shoulder and miraculously caught it. I hustled him feverishly to one side and said, "Now, give me that again, in words of one syllable. And quick!"

"Of—of course, Mr. Gordon," quavered the small man obediently. "I—I just happened to see him. One of the men is not what he pretends to be. He's a fraud, a spy! He came here today to learn what this new American weapon is. And he took advantage of the confusion to steal a vial of pyrodine."

I gasped, "Oh, golly! I wonder if the officers have discovered it yet?"

Evidently they had. There was tremendous suppressed excitement amongst the American staff officers. A lieutenant scurried to the side of the officer surrounded by foreigners, whispered something to him. The general's face paled beneath its tan. He muttered a swift apology, then raced to join his confreres. I said, "Great balls of fire, what a story! Doc, you saw the guy? Which one was it? *Doc!*"

He didn't answer. My reply came from a less welcome source. Uniformed figures appeared at my side, and a soldier demanded, "You, Mister—what are *you* doing here? Come along with me. The general wants to see you! And you, too!" This last to a badly frightened Muldoon. Needless to say, we went!

THE next few minutes were definitely not happy. Joe and I were led to a tent beyond earshot of the invited guests. We were asked—but grimly!—who we were, what we were doing there, and how, above all, we had gained admission.

Our answers must have sounded pretty wan, but a call to the *Times-Star* office at least substantiated our claims.

Then came the embarrassing part. A couple of khaki-clad huskies grabbed us, and we were given a thorough casing from pate to paddies. Only when they were positive the missing pyrodine was not on us were we released. But the sword of military wrath still dangled over our heads. The C. O. said, "Apparently you gentlemen are not guilty of the—er—of the crime we are investigating. But you have committed a serious offense in effecting entrance to government property under false pretenses. You will be held for military trial. Take them away, Sergeant!"

I pleaded, "Wait a minute, General! I admit we had no right to come here. But we had a reason, a good one. And I *swear* we had nothing to do with the theft of the pyrodine."

"So!" The commandant's eyes lighted savagely. "You *did* know a vial of pyrodine had been stolen!"

"I didn't," I denied, "but *he* did!"

"He? Who is 'he'?"

"Dr. Smerk. Doc—" I begged—"speak up, man! For goodness sakes!" There came no answer. But a sudden thought struck me. The little man must be *somewhere* around. "Joe—the glasses!" I said. "Give 'em to me, quick!"

Muldoon looked like an accident seeking somewhere to happen. "That—that's what I was tryin' to tell you, Sam," he quavered. "The glasses got bust durin' the explosion!"

"Glasses? Dr. Smerk?" The general's confusion left him abruptly. "I don't understand your nonsense, sirrah! Nor shall I attempt to! Let us have no more of this—"

But I wasn't listening to him. For at the eleventh hour had returned that quiet little voice for which I'd called in vain. Dr. Smerk was whispering swift queries into my ear. The first of these I relayed to the general.

"Excuse me, sir, but would it not be possible to seize each of your visitors individually, search each man before the guilty one has a chance to get rid of the pyrodine?"

The general stared at me as if I were a madman.

"Absolutely impossible, Mr. Gordon! Gad, man, don't you realize these gentlemen are guests of our government? We have been the chief exponent of Western Hemisphere solidarity. If we were to violate our 'good neighbor' policy in this hour of need, the repercussions would shake the very structure on which our foreign relations are based!

"Furthermore—" He shook his head grimly—"should we attempt to lay vio-

lent hands on the culprit, he might sacrifice himself to our cost. Hurl the explosive to the ground and destroy not only us, but all our guests, as well. No, Mr. Gordon, your suggestion is valueless. Now, I am inclined to believe you are simply stalling for time. You and your photographer friend—"

Doc Smerk had been whispering some more. I broke in desperately. "General, we—I—think there is a way out. Do you have a bomber on this field? One large enough to contain all the foreign visitors?"

"Why—yes," said the C.O. "But I don't see—"

"Then won't you please give us a chance to clear ourselves?" I begged. "This sounds crazy, I know. But we didn't steal the pyrodine; you, yourself, are convinced of that. We must try to find the one who did. I think I know a way. If you will just cooperate with me—"

The general stared at me thoughtfully for a moment.

"This is all *most* irregular," he hesitated. "But—there is some merit in what you say. This is a critical *impasse;* we have nothing to lose by giving you a chance. Well, what is it you want?"

"A large bomber—" I said breathlessly, repeating the instructions Dr. Smerk was pouring into my ear. "Then a man with a portable radio transmitter to be set up on the parade grounds. A pilot with a—a parachute, did you say, Doc? Oh, yes, I see—a pilot equipped with a parachute—and—"

Swiftly I outlined my requirements. They were wild, bizarre, fantastic. But the general, having agreed to cooperate, did not now retract his promise. He issued the necessary orders, delegated to me the authority I requested. And a few minutes later, apparently free men, though in truth we were still under closest surveillance, Joe and I were stepping forward to mingle

DICTATORS WANTED!

● Out of the past they came, out of their many graves in many times and lands. . . . These blood-stained bigshots of history!

Caesar, Frederick the Great, Attila the Hun—Chaka the Zulu, Hannibal, Napoleon . . . there were twenty of them all told; wild, ruthless men wearing swords and armor, gnashing their teeth and muttering strange oaths—and each with a look in his eyes to turn a tiger pale!

But they were carefully guarded, for the greatest dictator of all time had them working for *him* (or so he *thought!*) ●

Ancient conquerors fight again in

THE VICTORY of the VITA RAY

By Stanton Coblentz

IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE

again with the envoys from the Latin nations.

THE American commandant performed most superbly the role allotted him in Dr. Smerk's mysterious drama. His bluff smile, his hearty manner, offered no hint that there was anything amiss. Through the interpreter he addressed his guests.

"Gentlemen, you have seen but the first of the United States' new defense weapons. Now I have another surprise for you. The gentleman beside me is Mr. Samuel Gordon, one of our nation's foremost scientists. To his genius we are indebted for an invention so spectacular that I shall not spoil the surprise by describing it beforehand.

"One of our army's finest Flying Fortresses awaits us. If you will all step into the plane, Mr. Gordon will now demonstrate his new invention."

They herded in, wide-eyed and eager. Had I the time to do so, I would go into a few rhapsodies over that bomber. What a job! There were more than forty of us, but it was so huge that we simply rattled around in it. A pilot warmed the motors. In the hubbub I sneaked a moment to whisper, "You're all set, Doc? You sure you can swing it?"

A small voice breathed back, "I—I believe so, Mr. Gordon. Oh, mercy me, I hope so!" And finally, as my nerves were about to erupt like a supercharged volcano, those mighty engines roared, we rumbled across the field into the wind and took off.

It was then I assumed my share of the burden. With a pretense of assurance and aplomb I certainly did not feel, I stepped forward and addressed the group.

"Gentlemen," I said, "you are about to witness an exhibition of the United States' newest and greatest military device. A thing science has dreamed of for years, but never before been able to perfect." I paused a moment dramatically; then: "The automatic, robot-controlled airplane!" I announced.

A moment of dead silence followed the interpreter's relay of this message. Then a score of voices broke into wild speech. I stilled them with a wave of the hand.

"If you will look to the field below," I suggested, "you will notice a single operator sitting before what appears to be a portable radio transmitter. Actually, those controls govern the flight of this ship.

"The pilot now seated in our cockpit serves only one function: to lift the ship off the ground. That accomplished he drops from the bomber. The radio operator takes over the controls, guiding the ship and its deadly cargo to its objective. Captain, if you will demonstrate—?"

The pilot, a trifle dubious, but still gamely obedient to orders, rose, saluted, and flung himself out of the ship. Seconds later his chute opened like a great, silvery mushroom, lazily drifted to the field below. And the cockpit was absolutely empty!

Or to all intents and purposes empty. Of the forty souls aboard, only I guessed the meaning of Muldoon's cryptic whisper. "Careful, Doc! Leapin' snakes—careful!" But that remark went by unnoticed. For after a momentary shrug, the huge machine regained its power, wheeled in a wide arc to the east, and soared oceanward.

Successful exhibition? Pal, you don't know! Those South and Central Americans were simply staggered. They peered into the vacant cockpit, stared awestruck out of windows, whipped up a veritable storm of syllables in their admiration of this marvel. The funny thing is, it never seemed to occur to any of them to be scared at being thus designated guinea pigs on a robot-controlled flight. The only ones who looked at all apprehensive were Muldoon and yours truly. Joe sidled over to me anxiously.

"Sam," he husked, "do you reckon that little squirt knows what he's doing?"

"He seems to," I whispered back. "It was his idea."

"Well, he'd better," gulped Joe, "or it's goin' to be just too bad. With—*Omigawd!*"

His prediction broke off in a startled yelp. I imagine I hollered, too. Because at that moment one of the huge motors spluttered into silence. Then another cut off. The ship lurched, wobbled, jerked like a one-winged duck in a cyclone. Then with what seemed to be horrible ease, it winged over and swung into a slow, narrowing, spiral glide!

Muldoon's face turned fourteen shades of green. "I knew it!" he howled. "We're falling! We're out of control!"

I'LL say one thing for hemisphere solidarity. Uncle Sam picked himself a game bunch of neighbors. It was a moment for panic, but that outfit of army officers didn't panic any more than an equal number of wooden Indians. To a man, they held their positions, looked for orders to the representative of the United States Army.

Nor did he fail them. He stepped forward briskly, divided them into two groups, pointed to the exits. "Everyone have his parachute? All right, easy does it, now. One at a time. Tell them, interpreter."

The word-mangler babbled his instructions. He made heavy weather of it, for he—a civilian like ourselves—was none too gleesome about the affair.

"Everything's going to be all right," proclaimed the general. "We have a lot of elevation, plenty of time. And fortunately we're over the water."

I looked down. He was right. Our journey eastward had carried us out over the Sound. Its wavelets flashed and rippled in the sunlight.

"Plenty of ships down there," continued the army officer. "They'll pick us up as fast as we drop." He permitted himself a thin smile. "Too bad this accident had to happen, gentlemen. But I'm mighty glad of *one* thing. That we didn't have any of that pyrodine aboard. I didn't mention it before, but that new explosive acts with doubled violence when it is exposed to a liquid element. If we ever struck water carrying that stuff there wouldn't be enough left of us to— *There he is! Grab him, Gordon!*"

Me? Me grab anything? I was too dazed to move. For everything happened at once, and I didn't understand any of it.

At the general's words, a figure had sprung into sudden action. A gray-lipped figure in civilian clothes leaped to the window, flung it open, hurled something drawn from his pocket far out into the Sound!

Then, realizing that he had betrayed himself, the interpreter tried to throw himself out the window after the pyrodine he had stolen.

So it was Muldoon who got credit for the tackle. I only got an assist. But it was a very satisfying assist, because maybe I'm not as young as I used to be, but I'm still enough of an American to know what to do when an enemy jaw sticks up invitingly six inches away.

And in the background of my consciousness I was aware that the "falling" ship had once again settled to an even motion, that the passengers were returning to their places, and that from a supposedly empty cockpit a happy little voice was chirruping, "Oh, well done, Mr. Gordon! Oh, goodness me, you caught him *beautifully.*"

SO THAT was that. And of course after capturing the real spy, the C. O. couldn't very well shove us in the clink. So we were released with a pat on the back and a faceful of genial smiles and a cam-

erafull of exclusive pix worth a bonus on any man's newspaper. Not to mention the general's promise that one Sam Gordon of the *Times-Star* should henceforth be granted priority on any hot news items to emanate from Fort Slocum.

More important, we got a chance to explain how it was we had kept a pilotless Flying Fortress in the air for more than twenty minutes. Our explanation was the biggest blow an army has sustained since Hitler's army tumbled down the icy steppes of Russia. The C. O. had to take our words on faith. With Dr. Smerk's polarized glasses broken, he couldn't play peep-show. But he talked, and he moved things, and he proved his claims beyond a shadow of a doubt. And the general said:

"Very well. I've seen enough, Dr. Smerk. You have my solemn assurance that the United States government *will* accept this invention of yours, immediately if not sooner! Go home and collect your formulae. You and I will fly to Washington tomorrow."

Which wound up matters pretty well. All but for one thing. As we were driving back to New York I asked the Doc:

"Listen—I don't get it! You knew who the spy was all the time, Doc?"

"Why—er—yes," admitted the meek little voice at my right shoulder.

"Then why didn't you tell us, so we could grab him?"

"Oh, mercy, that would have been too dangerous! He might have thrown down the pyrodine and killed us all—"

"Nuts!" I stormed, "and nonsense! You are invisible, Smerky. You could have sneaked up to him and swiped it from his pocket. Now, come clean! Why did you make us go through all that fol-de-rol about the bomber?"

"Well," confessed Smerk, "for one thing, I thought it the best way to prove my invisibility—"

"And—?" I prodded him grimly.

"And for another," he said in a wistful little voice, "I always have wanted to pilot a bomber. I *love* bombers, Mr. Gordon."

So, there you are! What are you going to do with a guy who's not only a genius, but a whacky-pot as well? Anyhow, I should have realized he'd get us into trouble, I guess. You know the old adage. Where there's Smerk—there's fireworks.

Eyes of the Panther

By KUKE NICHOLS

"I have made a superb delirium
with only a lizard to start on."
— *James Branch Cabell*

THOSE last weeks in the city exhausted my endurance and tore even at my reason, but when at last I sped away from the bitterness and humiliation through the gray hills of New England, I felt my troubles slip away behind. I knew the mad whirlpool of my mind would slow toward placidity in the house my family had held for generations, the beautiful house on the high hill that looked eastward to the shining of the ocean.

I would be alone there, alone among the memories of a carefree childhood, in the home where I should have stayed, instead of allowing myself to be lured away into the strain of life and competition in the city, to which I was so ill suited. And now that I had failed, fearfully and perhaps shamefully, lost all my dizzy towering fortune save the old house and a little money that would permit me to live there unmolested for a year or two, now perhaps I could be at peace and happy once again.

I stopped in the village, to make sure my letters had been received and my instructions obeyed. Coal and firewood were needed, great stores of them, for the last withered leaves were drifting softly on the chill autumn wind; and provisions of every kind, for I did not intend to bother myself with frequent trips to the village, in which there were too many half-remembered faces, and too many friendly, curious, pitying eyes probing gently at the raw wounds of my self-esteem. It was good to get away from them, and I remember now that I sang as the car toiled up the steep gravel road.

The house was smaller, and its setting gloomier than I recalled. Its paint, refreshed at my whim the year before, gleamed whitely from the casements and the pillared porch, the brown of the old shingles was golden in the afternoon light, and the drive curved in among the giant, friendly elms I remembered so well. But the pine forest behind towered like a wall of emerald night, and the house seemed to shrink back into its long shadow guiltily, huddling under the slopes of its own dark shingled roof.

But the darkness in my mind which retouched even this familiar scene soon left me, and my life fell into a pleasant pattern there on the high and lonely hill. For long hours I would doze or read, looking now and then with infinite comfort on the patchwork of field and orchard and woodland that dropped away past the distant village to the sparkling edge of the sea. And I would walk on pleasant meadows rimmed by the shining white of birches and the occasional bulk of some rugged, hoary tree that had somehow escaped the axe of the pioneer and the long malice of the wind.

And of course I cooked and washed, and split and carried wood, and each night I slept with a dreamless depth I had never known before. Day followed after shining day, while my mind and body healed.

So passed a week, and then came rain,

There IS a way to pass the gate—a sky-reaching gate of flame beyond which weep the legions of the damned!

"The great oak hurled itself forward—its branches writhed and reached. . . . "

a heavy pouring rain that lashed the eastern windows, while the wind that bore it shuddered and sang around the house, and the pines roared with a deep varying thunder. At first it felt luxurious to sit before the leaping fire, but I soon grew bored and restless.

Early in the afternoon my prowling took me into the attic, where stood many old trunks, most of them filled with the commonplace rubbish of three generations. Only one interested me, a small chest of some dark wood, bound by riveted iron bands.

This, I had been told, had been sealed by my great-grandfather Ebenzer, who had solemnly read a curse upon any member of the family who should open or destroy it. And since during his lifetime his curses had seemed to be peculiarly effective, he was still feared enough after death so that the chest had lain unmolested.

I PULLED tentatively at the iron, and the wood collapsed under it, sending up a puff of acrid dust. It was completely rotten, as if it had long been wet. Perhaps there had been a drip upon it, before I had the roof reshingled.

Inside there was a box about a foot and a half square. I slid it out between the bands, and saw that it was wrapped three times each way by a tarnished silver chain, and that the chain was made of tiny crucifixes, linked end to end, and fastened at last by sealing wax. As I touched the wax it gave way, and the chain unwound from the box, sliding through my fingers to the floor.

As the last loop fell, I seemed to see from the corner of my eye that a crack between two boards of the attic floor widened into a crevasse filled with blackness, and out of its velvet depth eyes looked at me, a pair of gleaming yellow eyes. Hideously startled, I jerked my head around to look directly at the spot, and saw nothing but the dusty boards with a faint crack between them.

It was some trick of light, I thought. But I was no longer comfortable in the attic. Its shadows seemed full of life, and I found my ears straining to hear some whisper, inaudible above the tumult of the wind. I slipped the chain into my pocket, and carried the box down to the fire, to examine it further.

It was locked in some obscure way, but it was as rotten as the chest, and I easily pried the lid from its hinges. Within was a mass of palpable darkness, out of which a spangle of stars shone remotely. I rubbed my eyes, and a second look assured me that it was only some black flimsy cloth sprinkled with tiny stars of phosphorescent or radioactive material that shone with its own light.

Reassured, I removed the stuff from the box, and found it was wrapped around some object. After unwinding yards of the cloth, that clung slightly to my fingers with an unpleasant feeling, I loosened its last fold, and in my hand was the Book.

Its covers were of thick, carven wood bound in blackened silver, and their hinge was of some heavy greasy material of greenish black. The lower cover had almost rotted away, and pieces of its carving lay on the starry cloth. But the upper lid was hideously well preserved.

In its center was a circle, broken at the top, containing an exquisite rendering of a thatched cottage under a graceful tree. By the door of the cottage stood a man, a woman and child. Above the circle was stretched at ease a great cat, a panther, perhaps, stained black in contrast with the rest of the carving, which was pale brown. The cat's face was turned outward from the book, and in its eyes were set tiny specks of gold.

On each side of the circle, and below, was an obscene nightmare of nameless, misshapen beasts and birds; a curious,

dreadful piece of diabolism from which my sense of decency recoiled. Instinctively I looked away from the loathsome images.

Perhaps it was because of this that I had a peculiar difficulty in bringing myself to open the book. I threw more wood on the fire, walked around peering out through the streaming windows at the storm, drew a glass of water in the kitchen, and finally, very much annoyed at my own prudery, returned to the chair and abruptly opened the book. As I did so I was sure I heard all around me a quick sibilance as of tense, indrawn breaths, and the attic stairs creaked once, and were silent.

There had been fifteen pages in the book, and of these three, the first, the eighth and the fifteenth were thin sheets of unmarked, clouded mica, while the rest were of thick parchment. The first six of these were in poor condition, but among the green and yellow stains of mold, I could see traces of an elaborate script. Beyond the middle page of mica, however, the very structure of the pages had rotted away, and there was little remaining except rags and dust, held together by the filaments of the fungi that had wrought its destruction. Only near the binding were these pages at all preserved, and there I counted them, and found scraps of writing.

I must have sat there for hours with the strange book in my hand, while outside the fury of the storm died away. I know I slept fitfully and dreamed, dreamed of a sky-reaching gate of flame behind which wept the legions of the damned, pleading piteously with me to let them free. And of the shape and manner of these damned I remember nothing, save that their eyes were the eyes that had looked through the crack in the floor, that I sorrowed for them, deeply, helplessly, and yet feared them, too.

When at last I fully wakened, I was sick and shaky. The storm had cleared away and the house was silent, but as I went about preparing my evening meal, I felt that I was watched, and learned that if I looked sharply at any shadow, it would move a little and then be still. I feared the old house, and the strange book, and the long night that lay ahead, and more than these, I feared the curse of old Ebenzer. But I crushed down my fears, and when I turned out the lights for sleep, the life in the shadows seemed to die, and my sleep was deep and dreamless as the night before.

The next morning came clear and very cold. I walked briskly for an hour in the fields, split quantities of wood and brought a good supply into the living room. Everything was bright and cheerful, and I laughed at myself for the fears of the previous day.

I took up the book to examine it more carefully. I felt that it probably contained the creed or rituals of some cult of pretended magic or witchcraft, in which my great-grandfather had believed, and that it would be interesting to decipher it.

As I thought this, something impelled me to glance out of the window, and there, in my sunlit New England yard, lay a great black panther, who raised his head and looked at me with lustrous yellow eyes, the eyes of the attic and the dream. As I stared at him he vanished.

IN SPITE of the wind-swept brightness of that autumn day, a dark terror rose up and seized me by the throat, and the book felt cold and slimy in my sweating hand. With quick repugnance I flung it toward the fire. It struck against the andiron and fell back safely on the hearth, and then it seemed to me as if a fearsome screaming had been cut off in mid-note—although I had not been conscious of hearing it until it stopped.

Long minutes I sat there waiting, waiting for I knew not what, while the frantic hammering of my pulse died back to nor-

mal and my unreasoning terror ebbed away, leaving my common sense in control again.

For, I told myself, there was nothing to fear. I was modern, too modern to even disbelieve greatly in the powers of darkness. If such powers were as nonexistent as our science claimed, the book was a harmless curiosity, and I had imagined the eyes, the panther and the screaming. And if science were wrong, if there were a gate from our world into some other dimension, some other space peopled by all the dark panopoly of legendary terror, and this book controlled the gate, what then? Old Ebenzer must have used it, and his life had been long and prosperous.

Perhaps this book had powers that could regain for me my lost wealth, all of it and more. And if the phantom panther should be the familiar of the book, bound to its service as the djinns to the service of Aladdin's lamp—ah, what treacherous throats he would rend at my bidding!

Now I was trembling again and my mind was slipping, slipping into that black whirlpool of frustration and hate that I must avoid. Grimly I fought back, crushed alike the wish for vengeance on the men who had robbed me, and the hope that I had found a magic charm. Soon I was calm again, but the attraction of the book had grown to be more than curiosity, and I knew I could not be at ease until I had solved its riddle.

THROUGH the afternoon and late into the night I worked, cleaning the pages carefully and striving to interpret the beautiful but illegible writing. I succeeded in understanding only a few scattered phrases, but they served to stimulate my interest.

After a night of heavy slumber that somehow did not refresh me I put aside the temptation to work on the book, and took my customary walk. I had an odd impression that the great old trees were looking down at me with grave approval, and that the young and shining birches turned a little to watch me as I passed, and again I fought down an unreasoning terror.

That afternoon I finished the first half of the book, guessing at a few words, and filling in others that the rot had utterly destroyed. And its words, unforgettably burned into my consciousness, were these:

"Through the chinks and crevices of man's world, peer the creatures of the Pit, longing for their own.

"They pine from the hearts of trees and the depths of caves, whence they may not stir while the door to the Pit is closed.

"This is the book of the Pit, and the powers that lurk in the Pit, powers that once possessed the world, but may not possess it again, unless some man let them in unbound.

"This is the Book that holds the key to the door that may let them through, and this is the Book of the spell that shall hold them bound.

"Cursed be he who destroys the Book, cursed by the Pit and all its Powers, and he shall die in madness and fear.

"Cursed be he who turns the Key and opens the Door, and wields not the Spell that binds, cursed be he by men and by God.

"This is the Key that opens the Door; that opens man's world to the Powers of the Pit, and the Powers of the Pit to the Man:

"Let there be three sticks the height of the Man—one of oak, one of elm and one of young pine; all the thickness of the wrist of the Man, and not quite round;

"Let there be black cloth which shines with the stars that made it; cloth that may burn forever and not be consumed;

"Let the three sticks be bound into one by the Cloth of the stars and the

night, so their wood may no longer be seen;

"Let the three sticks and the cloth be stood, erect and be buried the length of the foot of the Man in earth where grass has grown;

"Let a fire be built around the Sticks and the Cloth, and let the wood of the Fire be of pine and of elm and of oak, but let the kindling be of dry grass;

"Let the Fire burn until the Sticks are consumed, that the Key may turn in the Door;

"Then the Cloth shall fall in the flames, and the Door to the Pit shall open,

"And the Powers and the Creatures shall come up out of the Pit, and shall serve the Man who has opened the Door and who holds the Book and who knows the Spell."

BUT with the second half, the vital half that must have held the spell, I could do nothing. I found reference to a gray wolf, to twine and to a triple bar, but the rest was utterly missing, crumbled into its original dust of soot and mixed with the dust of parchment.

In its lack I had sense of irretrievable loss, for now I did believe that the book controlled a magic—a magic as antique as Man; one that the priests of most ancient Egypt had wielded with their strange, lost rituals, aided by the cats who were their familiars; a magic that had showed its head again and again through the pages of all history, and had now been fought back into a whispering darkness only by the power of the Church; and I knew that the old writings in this book were but a translation of books and scrolls yet older, harking back to when time began.

I knew I should set the book aside and forget that I had ever seen it, for did it not call down a curse upon whoever would evoke the spirits without the means to control them? This I decided, and yet in the early November twilight I found myself trimming a small pine, and laying its trunk beside a pole of elm, and one of oak. And then I saw that I had also made three piles of brush, and three of fine split sticks, and that they were made of oak, of elm and of pine, and I knew that the book must be destroyed.

Back to the house I strode, resolved that I would take the book and the cloth and the box and bind them harmless in the holy silver chain, and take them the next day to the priest of the village, so that he might destroy them, and the curse rest on him, not on me. But when I went to the book, the great panther crouched between it and me, and though his eyes were loving, his eyes were fierce, and in their hypnotic yellow glowing my determination faded and I could not pass him, whether for pity or fear, I knew not.

Then slumber came, early and insistent, and I dreamed again of the gate of fire and the wailing of the damned, and behind the gate the panther padded, his eyes full of anguished pleading, eyes that promised me love and obedience beyond the need of any spell. And in the dream everything beyond that gate was of beauty and wonder and pain made misty by the flaming of the gate.

When morning came I only half woke and the house wavered uncertainly around me. Mechanically I performed my household tasks, kindled fires and ate and cleaned, while a desperate urgency of things to do pressed on my bemused consciousness. I left the book upon the arm of the chair before the fire, left it there unbound, and when I left the house, I did not turn my steps toward the village, but to the woodpile, and my pocket bulged with the black cloth and its shining stars.

Then my steps carried me northward, still as if in a dream, and under my arm were the three sticks, of oak, of elm, of

pine, and in my hand was my keen, fresh-sharpened axe.

In the near meadow, I went to the greatest of the ancient oaks, turned and came back thirty paces, while some fierce constriction tightened on my head. Then I took the shining axe and dug with it in the stony, frozen sod, dug with quick hard strokes. I measured my foot upon the handle, and that deep I dug the hole.

I took the three sticks and wrapped them in the star cloth, loop on filmy loop, till they were just a spangled darkness. Then I stood them in the hole and filled the hole and stamped the brittle frozen earth around them.

It was while I fetched the three piles of brush and three sticks that I noticed that the bright morning sky was dimmed, but not with clouds; and that a wind wandered without direction in the tree-tops, saying strange things I could not hear. It was somehow hard for me to look upward, and the oppression in the back of my head drove me on without my will in a world like a darkening dream.

With a skill that was not my own I made the pyre—was that wind whispering it was the funeral pyre of the whole bright world? —first the dry grass, then the brush and last the sticks, brush and sticks of pine, of elm, of oak, heaped round and round the triple stick whose blackness shone with stars. There were matches in my hands, but my hands were shaking, and I shrank back from the triple triple pile around the triple stick—shrank back against the agony of the oppression in my head, while I felt the panther watch me tensely, and I sensed shapeless things that stood and muttered to other shapeless things, and the great trees leaned down and whispered pleadingly, and the fitful breeze spoke urgently of other things. Long I stood motionless, but something tipped the scale, and I struck a match and lit the pile in one place, in another and a third.

The breeze moaned slightly and was gone, the trees lifted their branches in relief and all around there was a creeping and a rustling, but the growing fire seemed to snap and crackle in a silence.

It burnt at first as any fire would, until the flames bathed the cloth. Then they were sucked into the space between the sticks and the fire roared into a whirling cone of flame reaching to half their height, while out of their top grew a ball of yellow light, that strained and twisted like a balloon tugging at its string. And in its yellow radiance, and the weak light that fell from the still darkening sky, I saw the creatures.

Beside the great tree crouched the panther. Behind him, and to my right and left there walked and crept and rolled such things as haunt deliriums, shocking mixtures of man and beast and fish and reptile, of form and color beyond description. And their eyes were dead, like the eyes of a snake. I tried not to look at these, nor at the parodies of birds, vulturish things of horrid brilliance, that sat upon the branches of the trees, their eyes filmed balls of hate. I tried to look only at the spirits of the wood, who stood back along its edge, weird lovely things, more beautiful, more seductive than human flesh could be.

I stood awhile like a thing of stone, and watched, unfeeling and unthinking, until to my ears came a far, faint, insistent sound, the frantic tolling of a bell—the bell of the village church. And with the sound came a dim realization of this thing I had done in unleashing these horrors upon the world. My hands writhed with the torment of my mind, writhed into my pockets, and there one of them touched the silver chain!

With a vision now completely cleared, I saw the hideous scene before me truly: a giant devil-cat, eyes alight with malignant triumph that showed their former loving promise to be wicked treachery; a horde

of hideous monstrosities which God in his kindness had banished from the world of men, of fearsome, ghoulish birds and of wood spirits whose beauty was alien and deadly as the glistening scales of a poison snake; all giving tongue with a horrid, ululating sibilance as they worshiped the yellow ball of evil fire and waited for the falling of the cloth to overwhelm the world with terrors undreamed of.

IN THAT moment I knew to the full my blasphemy and wickedness, my crime against the glad world these things would destroy. But perhaps it was not yet too late! I felt the thought travel from the chain, up my arm and into my brain, there to explode into furious activity. With a single bound I reached the accursed whirling fire and wrenched at the star-wrapped sticks, shouted madly and wrenched and pulled though the flames licked my legs and the hot cloth seared my hands as it twisted like a wounded snake. The strength of my desperation prevailed, and I tore it free and cast it aside, out of the flames.

And then a fearful, prolonged screaming rose against the sky as the creatures saw their triumph snatched away. I looked up to see a million eyes of dreadful, eternal hate upon me, looked up higher as the great oak hurled itself toward me—it stood rooted but flattened its huge trunk along the ground while its branches writhed in futile reaching for me. I screamed too, and turned, and fled, feeling all that vast delirium pounding after me. More trees fell, some behind, some ahead and some even upon me, so I fought in a tangle of choking clutching branches, while the pursuit came on. But the strength born of my insane terror and growing purpose was such that even though the old elms of my front yard

CITY WEREWOLF

The countryside has phantoms, demons, monsters — and their terror is as old as Time. But they are gone . . . as far as the city is concerned.

For the city has spawned its own horde of horrors!

Yes, the city has its own werewolves!

Imagine sooty, disgusting beasts reeking of the slums; and in this stale and sickening stench is all the ugliness, the hopelessness and pain of the big city!

Our fears are the fodder of these monsters . . . they haunt us, terrorize us, try to rule us!

And when you hear the racking surge of subways and street cars, the growl of engines, the mumbling of radio voices . . . you are hearing the voice of the city werewolf!

This tale of modern-day terror is titled —

THE HOUND — And It's by FRITZ LEIBER
In Your November Issue

came twisting down on me in a blur of flailing, fumbling branches, I won through to the porch and to the living room to snatch the devil-book from the chair and hurl it into the still glowing fire.

It caught instantly with a green flaring, and turning, I saw that its radiance beat outward, not like light, but like rolling clouds of smoke. In the forefront of the indescribable things which had followed me crouched the panther, his tail lashing, his eyes yellow pools of burning hate, unforgiving and unquenchable. The smoke reached him and he was gone, and behind him the creatures vanished as it touched them, but in the instant of their disappearance, they looked at me, and their eyes too were yellow hatred.

I could not see the house around me, I saw only the green radiance rolling outward, stiffening the tree branches where they twitched upon the ground, dissipating alike the shapeless horrors and the wood-things with their sinister beauty, all the unclean things; rolling on and on, purifying the world again for man.

Abruptly the house took shape around me, and I saw that it was burning fiercely in every board and beam. I rushed out through the tangle of fallen elms to collapse in the road, and there they found me, burned and screaming and raving.

Long they held me in the hospital, so clean and cool and white, and they talked to me soothingly but in vain. At last there came my keeper, who took me away from them, and away from the hateful trees, on this great ship that steams southward.

THEY say it was a cloud that darkened the sky. Then why did the church bells ring?

They say the cloth in the meadow had no stars or traces of stars. But why are the palms of my hands burned with tiny stars, burned deep so they do not heal?

They say the trees fell in a sudden wind. But why do they burn the wood in great piles in the meadow, while the hearths of the village are cold?

They say my madness invented it all. But why, *why* do they exorcise the cloth and the ashes, again and again and again?

YES, they say I am mad, and I know with all the conviction of the madman that I am not—not yet.

Not mad, but accursed, for I have blasphemed against God and this beautiful world that lies like a lid to keep down the horrors of the Pit, and in this world I may not be forgiven.

And I raised the creatures of that Pit by my blasphemy, and I incurred their hatred forever and ever when I destroyed the instrument of that blasphemy.

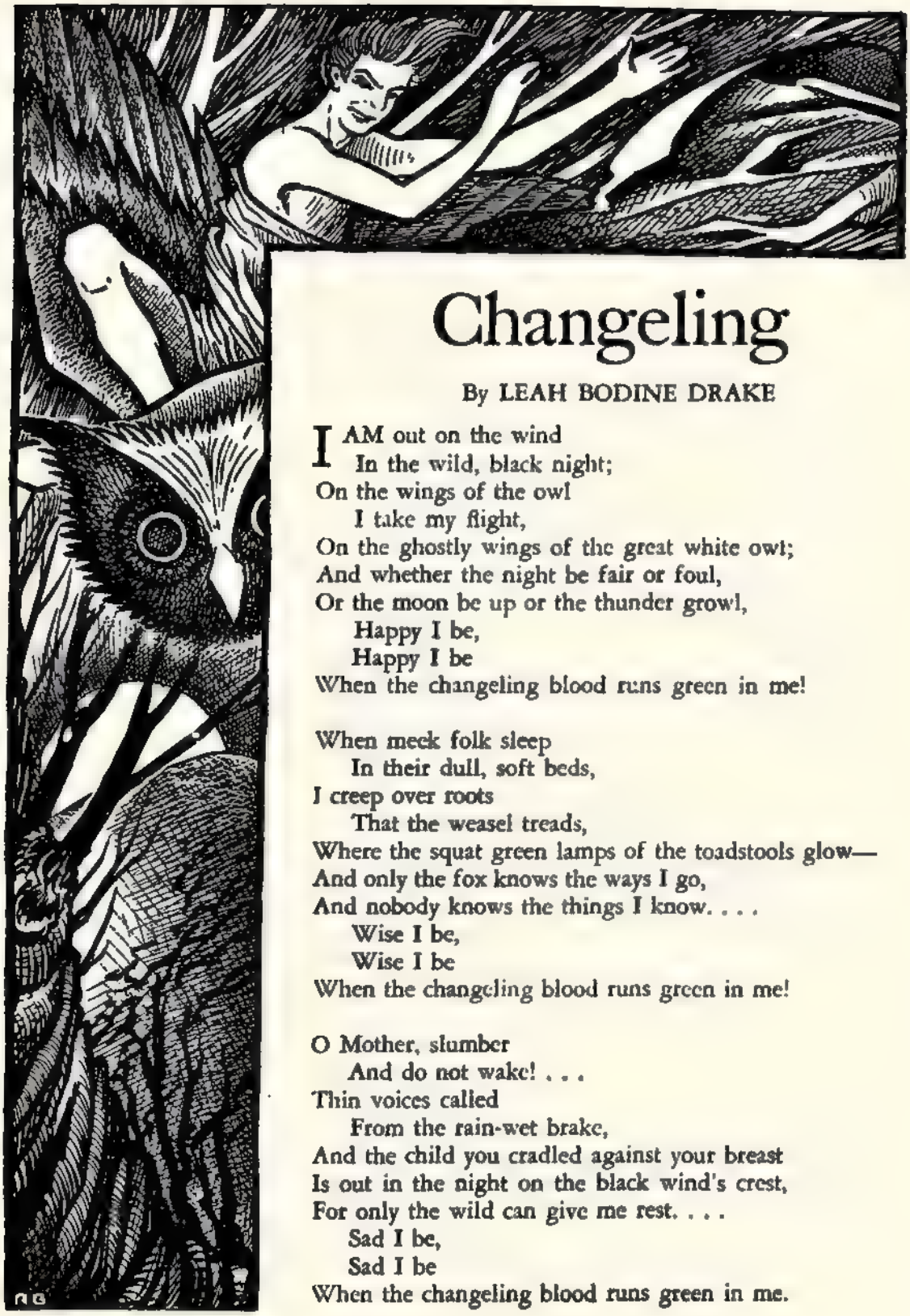
And even here on the wide sea I cannot escape their vengeance, for in the night the creatures of the sea comes near the boat, and look at me with unwinking yellow eyes that are the eyes of the panther.

Every night these shadows are more bold, and creep further into the room and out onto the decks; but no one else can see them, or hear their obscene whisperings, for they seek only me.

And I know that southern islands climb nearer over the curve of the earth, the islands of the voodoo and the zombie, where the powers and the creatures of the Pit have found another door through which they have come bound, but not bound so tightly that they cannot haunt me now and attack me soon, when I am nearer.

So I know that soon I will die—in madness and in fear, as the curse has said.

Afterward—perhaps God will forgive.



Changeling

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

I AM out on the wind
In the wild, black night;
On the wings of the owl
I take my flight,
On the ghostly wings of the great white owl;
And whether the night be fair or foul,
Or the moon be up or the thunder growl,
Happy I be,
Happy I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me!

When meek folk sleep
In their dull, soft beds,
I creep over roots
That the weasel treads,
Where the squat green lamps of the toadstools glow—
And only the fox knows the ways I go,
And nobody knows the things I know. . . .
Wise I be,
Wise I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me!

O Mother, slumber
And do not wake! . . .
Thin voices called
From the rain-wet brake,
And the child you cradled against your breast
Is out in the night on the black wind's crest,
For only the wild can give me rest. . . .
Sad I be,
Sad I be
When the changeling blood runs green in me.

Never the

You'll meet in this tale the man whose soul is a raging battleground for the never-ending conflict between East and West. . . . And you'll read of a beautiful dancer and a monstrous revenge! For here is a drama charged with subtle terror in its sure approach of inevitable doom!

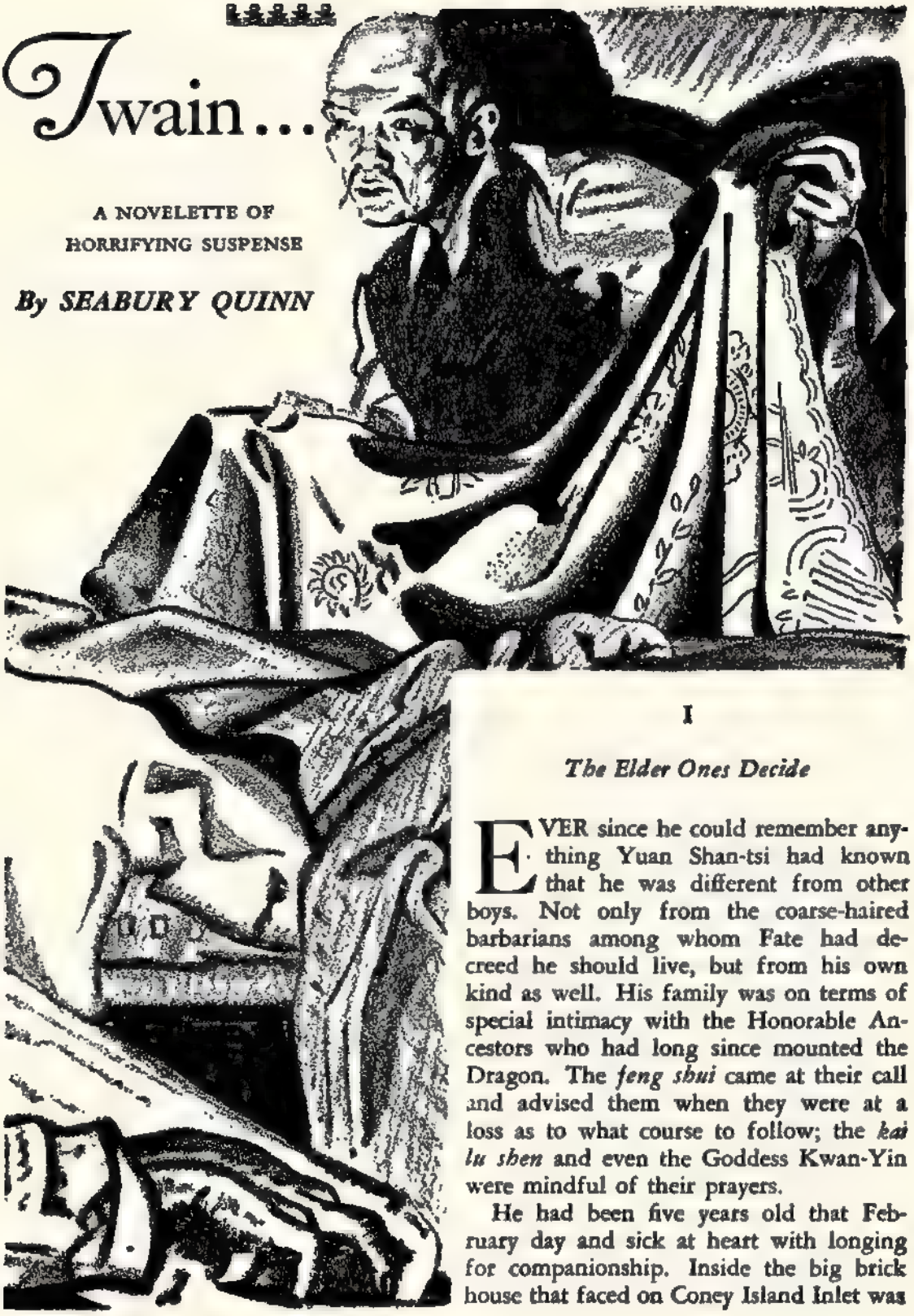
"Oh, East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet."

—KIPLING.

Twain...

A NOVELETTE OF
HORRIFYING SUSPENSE

By ***SEABURY QUINN***



I

The Elder Ones Decide

EVER since he could remember anything Yuan Shan-tsi had known that he was different from other boys. Not only from the coarse-haired barbarians among whom Fate had decreed he should live, but from his own kind as well. His family was on terms of special intimacy with the Honorable Ancestors who had long since mounted the Dragon. The *feng shui* came at their call and advised them when they were at a loss as to what course to follow; the *kai lu shen* and even the Goddess Kwan-Yin were mindful of their prayers.

He had been five years old that February day and sick at heart with longing for companionship. Inside the big brick house that faced on Coney Island Inlet was

warmth and coziness, and the cheer that comes with firelight and drawn curtains. And there was beauty, too. Beauty exhaled from things of priceless jade and brass, of silver, gold and celadon. A bellowed atmosphere of heirlooms, ancestors and history mingled with the redolence of exotic scents and the fragrance of tall, potted white narcissi. His small heart almost burst with the longing to be out in the street where the sweatered, legginged, mittened children played and tumbled in the fresh, soft snow, but when he put aside the curtains of silk rep and smiled ingratiatingly at the small savages they mocked at him and hurled snowballs and insults at the little ruddy face that looked so longingly at them.

That night he besought his father, "O Honorable Sire, be pleased to hear my plea. Send me, I beg you, to the schools of the barbarians, that I may mingle with them, know their ways and come to have them for my friends!"

"Abee," his father chuckled. *"Aboo,* small piece of scented jade, wouldst thou become as one of them?"

"I am a *Chi-jen,* a scion of the Manchu Banner-Men, and a descendant of the Three-toed Dragon's line," the little boy responded simply.

"Well said, son of the house of Yuan, and such shalt thou be ever, but concerning thy request to mingle with the coarse-haired ones I think thou art over young to start thy journey into the great world. Nevertheless, it is for *Them,* not me, to say regarding such decisions."

He led the way to the alcove where, veiled in drapes of ancient tribute-silk, the jade ancestral tablets hung, and after they had lighted incense sticks and made the seven-fold, profound kowtows before the altar, Yuan Ch'in-hsiu prayed, "O Venerable Ones, most August Forbears of our race and clan, make clear to us, the worms who creep upon the dust before thy altar, the course that we should follow, we beseech thee."

Small Yuan Shan-tsi remained kneeling with his forehead pressed against the rug of Peking-blue, for he was very fearful of the Elder Ones. Yet nothing happened. The purple-white incense curled in slow spirals toward the lacquered ceiling, from outside came the jingle of sleighbells as a one-horse cutter jogged down Exeter Street, but inside all was silent as the inside of a tomb.

Then, suddenly, it came. He could not be sure if the roaring came from far away and grew and swelled in volume as it rushed toward him, or if he heard it with his inward ear and felt its heightened intensity as he sucked his frightened breath in and held it till it seemed his veins must surely burst. But there it was—the rumble of the pounding of a hundred thousand unshod hooves, the roll of Tartar kettle-drums, the thunder of the Golden Horde's resistless charge—and out of the dim, swirling incense smoke he seemed to see an endless phalanx of mailed riders sweep, slim men on little wiry ponies, high-shouldered, clad in armor of black-lacquered leather with bright gold inlays gleaming in it, iron helmets on their heads and braided, fierce mustaches sweeping backward in the wind created by their mad onrush.

The charging horsemen passed, and after them the smoke revealed a wide, tree-shaded garden with a statue set up in its midst. Or was it a statue? It was as motionless as a thing formed of porcelain, but there was something vibrant and alive in its pale-cheeked face. Calm, aloof, oblivious the image seemed; the lovely, slanting eyes were wrapt and brooding, the lips that slashed across the ivory-yellow of the face were like a taint of spilled fresh blood; the thin arch of the jet-black brows might have been laid on with a bamboo brush.

Her hands were very long and narrow, and the brightly lacquered pointed nails were like slim, scarlet daggers on her finger-tips. For a moment—or an age, he could not tell which—she contemplated them with eyes as darkly lustrous as moss-agates, and then the faintest shadow of a smile seemed flickering on the carmine lips, and the slim head beneath its wreath of glowing blue-black hair gave a brief nod.

The Kwan-Yin, Lady of the Moon and Goddess of Divine Compassion, had deigned to give an answer to their prayer.

So little Yuan Shan-tsi went to the New York Public Schools, and became as much a good American as Isadore Abramowitz whose father came from Cracow, or Gregor Pophosepholos, whose family taproots reached back to the hills of Thessaly, or Henry Brewster Cabot, whose forebears came over in the Mayflower.

II

Yuan Ch'in-hsiu and Yuan Shan-tsi

NOW he was thirty-five, and all but a faint, wiped-over remembrance of that day had faded from his memory. He was not quite an atheist, but if you'd asked him what he believed in he would have had a hard time answering.

The edict that permitted queues to be cut off was passed before he reached high school, and with his hair close-shingled, dressed in the height of Western fashion, he passed readily for a dark-complexioned Occidental, though sometimes people took him for an Indian.

He was outstanding in his studies, and when the cheering section chanted, "We want a touchdown—we want a touchdown!" it was more often than not he who, with the pigskin clutched against his lean brown side, raced to victory with a speed and trickiness of running that out-distanced interference as easily as it avoided tackles.

He was more than merely surface-Westernized. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal—the government of the people, by the people, for the people"—those lessons struck responsive echoes in his heart. Sun Yat-Sen was right. Chin should be a republic. The old Empire was falling. Let it fall, the sooner the better.

Of course, he did not tell his father these thoughts. The "Venerable One's" heart would have broken at hearing that his son, a scion of the ancient Banner-Men, saw virtue in the democratic heresy. But in the secret meeting places of the revolutionary party he was among the most enthusiastic speakers, and—when they had finally overcome the age-old hatred and suspicion of the Cantonese for the Manchu—the leaders took him to their hearts and gave him work to do.

He was going regularly with his father to China, learning to know true from imitation in the realm of Eastern art, and on every trip he bore dispatches to the leaders of the Kuomintang—the National Republican Assembly. Who would suspect the young Manchus Yuan Shan-tsi, son of the illustrious Yuan Ch'in-hsiu who might have been a coral-button Mandarin had he remained in his homeland, of harboring republican sentiments, much less of carrying seditious messages?

Finally the fight was won. The pygmy Emperor Pu-Yi abdicated and General Yuan Shik-kai, a man of his own clan, was inaugurated President of China in the dragon-yellow courts of the Forbidden City.

It was after two o'clock when he returned from the celebration at the Garden of Ten Thousand Fragrant Felicities Chinese restaurant in Pell Street. A light was burning in his father's room, and as he tiptoed past the door a sudden impulse

made him pause and rap upon the panels softly.

"Come in, my son," the slurring Manchu syllables bade, and he stepped across the threshold, his head still slightly fuddled from the *ng ka pi* he had drunk, then halted as abruptly as if he'd run into a solid wall. Except in China, and then only on high ceremonial occasions, he had never seen his father in court costume. Now, in the rays of the small lamp whose wick floated in a cup of perfumed oil, Yuan Ch'in-hsiu sat in full Mandarin's regalia. His robe was black with a medalion of rich color worked upon the breast, tightly-fitting trousers of white satin came down to his ankles, on his feet were white silk socks and velvet shoes with three-inch-thick felt soles. He was wearing his official cap of office, a black silk fez-like hat with a coral button in a gold mounting on top, and a peacock feather slanting down behind it. Shan-tsi's Western training sloughed off at the sight. "Thou art up late, most Honorable Sir," he intoned formally.

The old man took the cover from a bowl of tea that stood beside him on the teak-wood *kang* and sipped it delicately. "O man-child of the house of Yuan," he replied at length, "this is an unauspicious day for our clan."

The silence lengthened, and finally Shan-tsi, knowing what was expected of him, replied softly, "It is even as thy jade-ship says, O Honorable One."

"Aye," his father repeated, seemingly as if he spoke to himself, "an unauspicious day. I am a man without a country, son of Yuan, for the coarse-haired barbarians have laws that set the yellow man beneath the black in human worth. I was born in that empire thy forbears took by right of conquest; never can I be a citizen of this land, though I have dwelt here many years and added much to its treasure. Neither can I claim our fathers' land, for the Cloud-Throne of the Son of Heaven is cast down and the execrable rabble of the South have set a state of their own up in its stead. There is no place on earth for me, my son—"

"Nay, ancient Long-beard, say not so," Shan-tsi replied when he was sure his father had done speaking. "This land is thine for a refuge—"

"For a refuge, yes," his father raised a delicately-veined hand, "but not for an inheritance. With thee, my son, the case is different. Thou wert born here, thou art a native-born American. Let thy duty be to this, the country of thy birth; cast out all thought of China from thy mind and take the ways of this land to thy heart."

"It shall be even as thou sayest, Thrice-honorable—"

"And when the time has come for me to mount the Dragon, see to it I am buried in the West. I would not have my bones laid in the earth polluted by the putrid spawn of Canton."

Shan-tsi bowed again but replied nothing, for he was literally stricken speechless. Not have his body taken back to China to lie in the ancestral soil when the geomancer had selected an auspicious time for burial? Not have his coffin of Mongolian cedar borne to the grave by grunting white-smocked coolies while kinsmen in the formal red of mourning scattered paper spirit-cash by the way and shaven-headed priests banged gongs and chanted prayers and hired mourners wailed and keened while at the head of the procession bumped and swayed the empty sedan chair in which the *kai lu shen*—the spirit that makes the way clear—might ride in majesty? An ex-Confederate's request for burial in a G.A.R. graveyard would have been less astonishing.

But he was a son of the house of Yuan and his father had spoken. "The harmony of thy voice is exquisite, Venerable Sire," he declared with another bow.

Once more he inclined his body three times from the hips, receiving in exchange a nod from his father. "Poor old Dad," he murmured as he went down the hall to his room, dropping naturally into the English words in which he did most of his thinking. "The Emperor's abdication and our kinsman's elevation to the Presidency must have been a nasty uppercut for him."

As his son's footsteps faded in the distance Yuan Ch'in-hsiu took a writing book and brush and ink pot from the *kang* beside him, and a small white pasteboard box of small white pills. Such pills could not be bought at any Western pharmacy, the law forbade their sale, but in the shops of Chinese druggists——

The little writing book had leaves of thinnest gold, like that sign painters use for lettering on glass. Ch'in-hsiu tore out a page of goldleaf, marked the *hong* for "Justice and Eternal Life" on it with the bamboo brush and wrapped it loosely round one of the small white pills. He put the gold-wrapped pellet in his mouth, took up the teacup and washed it down with a long draught, then pinched the lamp's flame out and leaned back in his carved blackwood chair. *"Ch'eung sang*—long life to thee, O Son of Yuan," he murmured as he closed his eyes and waited for the coming of the *feng shui,* the spirits who lead through the Dragon Gate the souls of those that die.

III

Flower of the Moonlight

THE third vice president of the All States Trust Company was more than merely cordial on the inter-office telephone. He was positively enthusiastic. "Tell Mr. Yuan to come in at once!" Young men with more than half a million dollars to their credit were always welcome in his office, and when the young man was a Chinese who probably didn't know one security from another his call was doubly appreciated. The All States had had some difficulty in marketing the latest issue of Aldyne & Hicks seven percent preferred stock. It seemed a kindly heaven had sent this young Celestial for the special purpose of——

Mr. Alcock was not altogether pleased at what he saw when the clerk showed young Mr. Yuan in. A young man slightly but compactly built, with high cheek-bones, a hawk-beak nose and close-clipped, haughty mustache above a wide, firm mouth, who spoke with a pronounced Harvard accent and wore a well-cut suit of Harris tweed—you couldn't talk pidgin English to a man like that. Probably you couldn't sell him Aldyne & Hicks seven percent preferred stock, either.

Five minutes' conversation confirmed his worst forebodings. Mr. Yuan was not interested in investment securities. He wanted to know why the All States refused to lend him forty thousand dollars when he offered Waterford & Allentown debentures as collateral, especially since Mr. Alcock had recommended those same bonds as gilt-edged investments to his late father.

"But you don't understand, my boy," protested Mr. Alcock. "Those bonds were perfectly good when I advised your father to buy them, but with the European war drawing money to munitions manufacturing, and away from railroad securities, the whole picture has changed. If you'll just be guided by me—"

Young Mr. Yuan smiled at him, and for a moment Mr. Alcock's life-long habit of outward self-control was shattered. There was something dreadful in the prune-black eyes that looked straight into his beneath the jutting brows, a flash of awful anger, like the flash of unsheathed steel, but the cultured Cambridge accents were harmless, almost gentle. "I under-

stand perfectly, sir. My father bought those bonds, and paid a hundred thousand dollars for them, on your advice. Now, two years later, your bank refuses them as collateral for a loan of less than half their face value. Will you be kind enough to let me have a blank check?"

"A check?" repeated Mr. Alcock, slightly flustered. "Why, certainly I'll let you—"

"And have your bookkeeper report my exact balance, if you please. I want to withdraw all of it—"

"Good heavens!" Mr. Alcock who taught Sunday School and was averse to all profanity, completely forgot himself. "You can't do that! Why, it would mean—"

Welcome diversion came in the form of a vision that appeared unannounced at the office door. A vision in black velvet and white fox, with an orchid trembling on one shoulder and a faint perfume exhaling from the furs that glistened with a powdering of snow. Her fairness outlined by the burnished walnut of the office wainscoting, a quince-colored flush in her cheeks and her eyes jewel-like, she smiled at them as if she were an angel busy with celestial thoughts. "Oh?" she apologized as she caught sight of Mr. Alcock's visitor, "I didn't know—" From under lowered lashes she regarded the young man with such a look of sustained indifference that there was no mistaking her interest.

Mr. Alcock coughed a soft perfunctory cough. "This is Mr. Yuan, my dear," he said suavely. "Mr. Yuan, my—ah—niece, Ramalha."

"Ramalha?" echoed Shan-tsi questioningly as he bowed to the girl.

"Quite so. My niece is on the stage. She prefers to be known by her professional name, without the usual complimentary title of Miss."

His small gray eyes shot from the young man to the girl, then back again. There was interest in their faces. H'm'm. His well-oiled mind was working smoothly. "I promised I would take her out to luncheon," he added with a slightly deprecating smile, "but we were getting on so pleasantly I quite forgot the engagement. Won't you join us?"

"Please do," the girl added as she caught the flicker of a look from Mr. Alcock. "We'd love to have you."

"And don't bother about that loan, my boy," Alcock whispered as Shan-tsi helped him into his mink-collared coat. "Come round tomorrow morning and we'll lend you fifty—or sixty—thousand on those bonds."

SHAN-TSI could not remember what they had to eat. His thoughts had been with Ramalha. She was like no other woman he had ever seen, tall, willowy, superbly graceful in her every movement. The glowing halo of her bronze-gold hair was her chief beauty, but her skin was like old China silk, her little teeth like blanched almonds, her lips as ripely red as broken pomegranates, her hands as frail and delicate as white narcissus blossom. Her throat-line was an arching curve of loveliness. She had, however, the eyes of an Eastern slave, languishing and passionate, and the slightly sneering but undoubtedly attractive mouth of a Parisian cocotte.

He drove her uptown after luncheon and at her request took her to the little, elegant bazaar in Park Avenue where he kept the cream of his art treasures for discriminating buyers with thick pocketbooks. He showed her objects worthy of a royal museum—a small graceful vase whose enameled surface held forever imprisoned the form of a Ming favorite, a libation-cup of milk-white jade, Mandarins' staffs of office carved from camphor-wood or ebony and topped with golden apples set with lapis-lazuli or garnet, oddly-shaped bits of celadon and tiny images of cultured pearl, no larger

than a dried pea, yet worth a hundred times their weight in gold.

She was spellbound by the beauty of the display, but, Western-womanlike, she put a price tag on it. "Why, these things must be worth a fortune!"

"They are the treasures of the oldest families in the oldest civilization in the world," he answered simply. "If the ancient Manchu houses had not been impoverished by the rise of the Republic there would not be money enough in New York to buy the smallest of them. When you came in the office today I was trying to negotiate a loan from your uncle to buy a collection of Sung bronzes that my Peking agent tells me may be had for forty thousand dollars. The Sung dynasty was the Golden Age of Chinese art, you know."

"Why, no, I didn't know it," she confessed, then, casually: "Did Uncle Grigsby let you have the loan?"

"Yes."

She gave him a long, soft look. The gently-glowing eyes held an invitation, almost a promise, but behind them her small, active brain was busy. A man who could borrow forty thousand dollars—and from Grigsby Alcock——

She had a small apartment in East Fifty-second Street, a jewel-box of a place where everything was white except the jet-black composition floor. The walls were ivory, the ceiling dead chalk-white, the furniture upholstered in cream kidskin. The long-haired rugs on the black floor were like pale water-lilies floating on a black pool. Through the partly-opened door he sometimes glimpsed her bedroom with its softly shaded lamps of cut rock-crystal and the full-length mirror framed in carved ivory.

Here they would sit before the open fire and smoke and drink the fragrant jasmine tea which he supplied her, or sometimes she would play for him and sing the latest Broadway hits in a rich, throaty pizzacato contralto. Presently the Ming vase with the lovely little slant-eyed Chinese lady smiling from its polished surface and the milk jade libation cup came to rest upon the mantel-shelf above the brass firedogs, and on the wall there was a silken scroll that blended all the colors of the Orient in the witchery of a painting by the master of all Chinese painters, Chao Kuang-fu.

"You shouldn't!" she protested when he brought the treasures to her. "Why, they're worth a fortune—"

"Hayah!" he laughed softly. "They had no worth at all till you admired them, little Flower of the Moonlight, and after that they had no value save as tribute to your jadelike loveliness!"

"Oh, you *do* say pretty things, Shan-tsi," she complimented. And after a while, when they had grown to know each other better, she persuaded him to buy a hundred thousand dollars' worth of Aldyne and Hicks seven percent preferred stock through the All States Trust Company.

SPRING came. You could hear roller skates clattering on the sidewalks and boys shouting gleefully over marbles. Crocuses peeped through the grass and barrel-organs sounded serenades along the curbs. A soft wind played about the budding trees and in the park the earth smelt sweet and warm. "You've never come to see me dance," she pouted as they sat beside the open window while a light breeze ruffled the organdie curtains. "Everybody says I'm good, even the critics, and—"

"I couldn't bear to, little Flower of the Moonlight," he defended. "To see your loveliness on display before an audience would—well, I'd be jealous of every other man in the theatre."

"But you will come—please?" she teased prettily. "Tomorrow night?"

"I fear I can't. You see, I'm due to start for camp tomorrow morning. My number was called in the draft last month, and—"

"Oh, Shan-tsi!" her voice was like a

wail. "They can't do this to you—to us! Why, you're not even an American. How can they make you fight for their country—"

"You're wrong!" he broke in sharply. "I am a Manchu, a descendant of the iron-capped Banner-Men who overthrew the Mings and set their leader T'ai Tzu on the Dragon Throne, but I was born here. This *is* my country. If it needs me—"

"Oh, piffle!" she derided. "Spare the Liberty Loan oration, Shan. I'm as patriotic as the next one, but this old war's spoiled everything. Grigsby—Uncle Grigsby, I mean—says they've almost killed the sale of good securities with their Liberty Loan drives, and all for nothing too, for the Germans have already won, and will be in Paris by September. Besides, it's taking all the nice young men to camp—"

She saw the anger gathering in his eyes and laid soft fingers on his lips. "Don't mind me, Shan. I'm all unstrung tonight, I guess." Then, brightening suddenly, "But you're leaving tomorrow and you've just *got* to see me dance before you go. Wait here while I slip on my costume."

Five minutes later he heard the soft click of the bedroom light-switch, then the soft rattle of the lock as she unlatched the door between them. The crêpe portieres at the doorway drew back, and she stood revealed like a lovely picture in a frame, a jewel that glowed against the velvet background of the bedroom's darkness.

He had not thought that change of costume could so change a personality. In Fifth Avenue or on Broadway she was American as turkey for Thanksgiving or buckwheat cakes and country sausages for Sunday morning breakfast; the figure rippling toward him with the grace of softly-flowing water was a daughter of the Gods, a temple *deva-dasi,* the mystery and allure of the Unchanging East incarnate. Her bodice was of saffron silk and sheer as net. Cut with short shoulder-sleeves and rounded neck, it terminated just below her bosom and was set with little imitation emeralds and small opals that kindled into witch-fires in the lamplight's glow. From breast to waist her slim, firm form was bare. A small-blue cincture had been tightly bound about her like a cummerbund, and from it hung a many-pleated skirt of cinnabar-red gauze. Across her smoothly-parted hair was draped a *sari* of pale lizard-green with silver edging, falling down across one shoulder and caught coquettishly within the curve of a bent elbow. Silver bracelets hung with little hawk-bells bound her wrists; bands of heavy sand-molded silver with a fringe of silver tassels that flowed rippling to the floor and almost hid her little blue-veined feet were ringed about each ankle. Between her brows there blazed the bright vermilion of a caste-mark.

She paused a moment before him, humming lightly a verse from *The Temple Bells:*

> The temple bells are ringing,
> The new green corn is springing,
> The marriage month is drawing very near——

Her feet were close together, touching at their inner sides, her knees were straight, her arms were stretched full-length above her head, wrists interlaced, the right hand facing left, the left turned toward the right, and each pressed to the other, palm to palm and finger against finger. Then she retreated from him with a swiftly shuffling step that set her ankle-bells to chiming, swaying like a palm tree in the breeze as she moved. She took the folds of her full skirt between her thumbs and forefingers, daintily, as she might take a pinch of perfumed snuff, and spread the gleaming, many-pleated tissue out fanwise as she advanced again with a slow, gliding step. Her head bent sidewise, now toward this sleek shoulder, now toward that, then slowly, as if exhausted, it sank back. Her large eyes

almost closed, like those of one who falls into a swoon of unsupportable delight, her red lips parted, fell apart in a slow, tantalizing, enigmatic smile that increased the mystery of her face.

Then she dropped forward in a deep salaam, head bent submissively, both hands held to her forehead with thumbs and forefingers together.

Her gray-green eyes came up to his dark ones, inviting, pleading.

His breath stopped with a jerk, as if a throttling hand had closed around his throat. "Ramalha!" he choked brokenly.

She flung herself into his outstretched arms and kissed him savagely, and as his arms closed fiercely round her, "Oh, Shan, I don't know whether you're a lamb or tiger!" she panted. "You seem so strong, so dangerous, but—"

"You'll marry me?" he begged. "Say that you'll marry me—"

"Of course," she settled herself in his embrace, then raised her lips to his again. "I've been engaged to you since we first met in the bank."

"Engaged to me? You—"

"Surely, you sweet, silly thing. I decided that I wanted you the moment I first saw you!" She pouted prettily at him. "And you've been long enough making up your mind about wanting me!"

"But I must be in camp tomorrow—"

"Yes, and all night long the New Haven will be running trains to Connecticut. To Connecticut, don't you understand, you old silly? The place where you can get a marriage license any hour of the day or night, and a justice of the peace to go with it."

IV

A Bill of Divorcement

FIRST-SERGEANT YUAN leaned back in his wheel-chair and looked out to sea in lazy contentment. In the cool and airy silence of a summer day before the sun became too hot he watched the other convalescents on the broad lawn, the sea gulls circling with sharp, hungry cries above the curling wavelets and the primly white-starched nurses busy with their patients.

He'd been at Biarritz almost two months now, and except that there was no mail from home he had nothing to ask for.

Van Vliet had gone to England, they told him, and would leave for home in a short while. There was more than an even chance he would regain his sight entirely. Good old Dutch! His eyes warmed at the thought of his buddy. There was a man!

From their first day in the dêpot brigade at Upton they'd taken to each other like affinitive chemicals, the descendant of the founders of Nieuw Amsterdam and the scion of the Manchu Banner-Men. They'd drilled together, worked together, slept in the same tier of pipe-bunks on the transport—even "gotten theirs" together.

A fragment from the same shrapnel that smashed Yuan's right leg had struck Van in the head and blinded him, so Van's sound legs and Yuan's sharp eyes had worked together to bring them back to their lines. "Gosh, Chink," Van chuckled as they stumbled to the dressing station, Yuan riding pig-a-back on his broad shoulders, "I'm all awash with blood. Don't know how much of it is yours and how much mine, but I'm certainly one hell of a mess."

"Our blood has mingled," Yuan Shan-tsi whispered as they laid him on the table and the orderly put the ether-cone to his face. "We have made the blood compact, thou and I, Walter Van Vliet. We are blood brethren. Your ancestors shall receive honor on the festal days of Yuan's house, you are adopted as a member of the clan that gave China T'ai Tzu, first Emperor of the Manchu line—"

He remembered their parting. "Good-

bye, Chink. Don't take any wooden nickels, and be sure to look me up when you get home. I'll be seeing you—I hope."

"Like to see the papers, Sergeant?" asked the little British volunteer worker. "They're just in from New York." She dropped a *Chronicle* and *Times* in his lap, flashed him a heavenly smile and hurried toward a group of convalescent Tommies with copies of the *Sketch* and *Bystander*.

He shook a paper out. "Let's see what's happening in the Big Town," he murmured. "Fay Bainter in The Kiss Burglar at the Eltinge, Hitchy Koo at the Globe, Eyes of Youth at Maxine Elliotts'—what's this?" The headlines struck him like a knotted fist:

BANKER'S WIFE NAMES DANCER

Ramalha, Exotic Oriental Dancer, Named Co-respondent by Mrs. Grigsby Alcock

Courtney Forsythe, known on the stage as Ramalha, was yesterday named co-respondent by Mrs. Margaret Alcock in her suit for absolute divorce from her husband Grigsby Alcock, third vice-president of the All States Trust Company. According to Mrs. Alcock's complaint, filed by Dillingsworth, Foote & Smoot, the dancer and her husband have been intimate for several years, and he was in the habit of introducing her to acquaintances as his niece.

An ugly sidelight is cast on the otherwise unremarkable story of a middle-aged man's infatuation with a young and pretty woman by the further allegation that the banker used the dancer as a lure and that she was in the habit of becoming friendly with certain wealthy clients of the bank and using her "persuasive arts" to induce them to buy highly speculative securities through the investment department of the trust company, of which Alcock was in charge.

President Humphries Barnstable of the trust company declared last night, "I am quite sure that Mr. Alcock, who has been a trusted executive of our institution many years, would not stoop to such chicanery, but we have asked another officer to take over his desk and duties pending an investigation of these charges which will, I am sure, be proved entirely groundless."

Miss Forsythe could not be reached at her 52nd St. apartment last night, as she is out of town.

HE LET the paper slide through his fingers to the close-cropped lawn. A sharper pain than that of his wound seemed drilling at his heart. Small incidents—little unconsidered trifles that had bothered him at the time but been quickly forgotten—were suddenly explained with terrible clarity: Her trick of referring to Alcock by his given name, then hastily correcting herself with, "I mean Uncle Grigsby," the gentle, teasing pressure she had put on him to buy that Aldyne & Hicks stock—

"Letter for you, Sergeant," the orderly's announcement broke through his bitter thoughts. "Looks like it's followed you all over the A.E.F."

The envelope was so filled with endorsements that the original typed address was scarcely legible, but in the upper left-hand corner he read the return card of a firm of Reno lawyers. "Who the devil do I know in Nevada?" he muttered as he slit the letter open.

Inside was a complaint and summons in a suit for absolute divorce. Courtney Forsythe Yuan vs. Yuan Shan-tsi. The plaintiff charged unbearable and inhuman cruelty, desertion and fraud in the procurement of the marriage inasmuch as the defendant had represented himself to be of Caucasian blood when as a matter of fact he was of the Mongolian race—Alimony—

The change that came over his face was not so much a difference of expression as

a slow hardening, like a freezing that began beneath the surface and extended slowly to the skin. It seemed his countenance had sharper lines, the eyes beneath the drooping, hooded lids and haughty brows seemed to retreat till they were like those of an old man. The lips seemed actually to lose their fullness, not merely to be pressed against the teeth. There was new sharpness to the chin, a pinched, almost frost-bitten shrinking of the cheeks each side the hawk-beak nose.

V

Reunion

"WELL, I'll be top man of a totem pole if it ain't old Ching Ching Chinaman himself!" The blow accompanying the words almost paralyzed his shoulder, and Shan-tsi looked up from his filet of sole Marguery into a pair of blue eyes smiling through the thick pebbles of rimless spectacles.

"Chink, you darn old fugitive from a Chinese laundry, why haven't you been to see me?" asked Van Vliet. "You know, you promised last thing—"

"Of course, I did," agreed Shan-tsi with a grin, "but I just got back from Peking last week, and things have been so out of hand at the bazaar I had to—"

"What the blazin' hell were you in Peking for? Ain't the good old U.S.A. good enough for you—"

"More than merely good enough, I assure you. But it took me longer to get well than they'd figured, and I was officially on the sick list when the Armistice was signed, so I took my discharge in France and went to Peking to pick up some Ming porcelains and other precious objects that I need—"

"Skip the sordid details of the laundry business, Chink. I want you to come meet my fiancée. Got your hat?"

"My hat? It's out in the check room, but—"

"Oh, it's all right, then. I just wanted to make sure you ain't wearin' it, 'cause Ramalha'd knock it clear off—"

"Ramalha?" Shan-tsi's voice did not break, but it came out of his throat without any tone.

"You said it, feller. Funny name for a girl, ain't it? But beautiful, don't you think?"

"Quite."

"And she's as beautiful as her name. There she is!" He paused beside a table and bowed, smiling. "Darling, I want you to met my old Army buddy. He's the feller who guided me home to the dressin' station when I was blinder than a flock o' bats."

She was more lovely, even, than he had remembered her. His glance took in the grace of her slim throat, the lovely contours of her arms and shoulders, the glory of her bronze-gold hair against the candlelight. She was wearing a black velvet evening dress so simple and so perfectly moulded to her body that it proclaimed its cost as clearly as if the price tag were still on it. A diamond and ruby bracelet glittered on her left wrist, around her neck was looped a string of perfectly matched pearls, and the sea-gems were almost an exact match to the pale-glowing skin on which they rested.

She glanced up at Van Vliet's words, and for a moment the hand winding in the pearls stopped still. Then, coolly, "How do you do, Shan-tsi?" she asked.

"You—you know each other?" gasped her fiancée delightedly.

The gray-green eyes beneath their fringe of curling lashes flickered momentarily with dispassionate irony. It was as if they asked, "Well, Shan-tsi, what will you say? It's your next move."

He bowed with all the formal courtesy he might have shown if he had been pre-

sented to a duchess, and nothing in his face moved. "I have had the happiness of meeting the lady," he acknowledged, and into his voice crept a shade of the singsong a Cantonese might have used. "It has been my privilege to admire her dancing. I cannot say I ever really knew her."

"We'll change all that toot sweet!" Van Vliet promised. "You're goin' to know her, Chinky, and love her, too. We're goin' to be three musketeers, we are. One for all an' all for one, an' all that sort o' thing. Sit down and crack a bottle of champagne with us, old-timer. Nothin' less will meet requirements o' *this* occasion. They'll have to serve it in a teapot, though. Some o' Andy Volstead's cellar-sniffers may be snoopin' round the joint."

"Thanks, no, Dutch," Shan-tsi refused. "I'm really all in from my long voyage, and"—he forced a grin to his lips, though his eyes remained unchanged—"there was a party down in Chinatown last night, and —well, I fear I leaned a little too hard on the bottle."

"Ha, boozin' again, were you, you benighted follower of false gods? I'll bet a dollar to a plugged nickel you were hittin' the pipe!"

The warmth of Van Vliet's friendly laughter was with him as he came from the restaurant, but as he paused upon the steps to fasten his topcoat he felt a sudden wave of sickness, not at his stomach, but in his heart. Van Vliet was his old army buddy, his more than friend, his blood brother. This heartless cocotte, this *ch'ing shik*—this vampire-woman—must not be allowed to serve Van as she had served him.

VI

The Counsel of the Moon Lady

HIS hurrying thoughts kept pace with the sharp rhythm of his feet as he marched down the avenue. He had to save Van Vliet, he had to regain the face he—and through him all his clan and family—had lost when Grigsby Alcock and this woman had conspired to fleece him. But how?

This was America and she was an American. Had she been Chinese he would not have hesitated. A fee paid to an "honorable hatchet-man," minute directions given, and she would disappear completely as a bubble blown into the ocean. But the guild of hatchet-men had limitations. It was doubtful if they would accept assignment to remove a white woman; certainly, if they did, they could not expect the protection of the silence with which Chinatown was wont to baffle the police after a tong killing. No. It was too risky, even if it had been possible, he decided.

Thoughts far away, he paused a moment to inspect a display of Oriental merchandise in a shop window. For the most part it was trash, it contained nothing to which he would have given shelf-room in his collection, but the figurine of Kwan-Yin that occupied one corner of the window caught his eye. It was executed in cheap porcelain, designed to sell for a dollar or two, but even its cheap workmanship could not disguise its lovely lines, the calmly curving brows, the gently smiling mouth . . . "By Lord Gotama's sacred eyelids!" he exclaimed and laughed half-cynically, half-shamefacedly. "Why not?"

The memory of that day so long ago when he and his father knelt at the family shrine and asked advice of the Elder Ones came to him like the echo of a half-remembered tune. It had been all nonsense, of course. Children are imaginative little devils, and he had been conditioned by the legends he had heard to expect signs and portents from the *feng shui*.

Still, there could be no harm in trying. He might draw inspiration from a session with the family shades. Lord knew it had

been long enough since he had paid them dutiful devotion.

Half an hour later he had lighted the prescribed joss-sticks, made the prescribed seven-fold kowtow, struck the brazen cymbal to attract the notice of the Honorable Elder Ones.

Nothing happened. He had been a fool to think it could. That childish nonsense—

Suddenly, without prelude, it came. The thunderous drumming of the unshod Mongol ponies' feet, the booming battle-cry of Tartar kettle-drums, the wild charge of the iron-capped riders from High Tartary. . . .

And after that the quiet garden of Kwan-Yin, and the faintly smiling Goddess seated in the midst of peaceful quietude with tall narcissi nodding gently round the pedestal of her throne.

She smiled at him. Her teeth were very white and very small and even. The lids of her eyes had the faintest tinge of violet-green, like the luster of old silk. Her lips were red as cinnabar.

"O Lady of the Moon, O Bodhissatava Kwan-Yin," he began, but stopped short, for the Goddess moved one ruby-nailed, frail ivory hand and motioned toward the short-shorn grass before her throne.

Across the greensward trailed a length of multi-colored, lambent silk as if it were endowed with a life of its own. He recognized it. He had picked it up in India on his trip home from the Orient, not buying it so much in hope of resale at a profit as because its beauty fascinated him. What was it doing in the garden of the Moon Lady?

He watched with fascinated eyes. Slowly, like a snake made sluggish by engorgement, it crept by degrees so gradual that its motion was almost unnoticeable, and in its wake the green, lush grass grew white and fungus-like, devoid of life as something seared by fire, and then turned brown and brittle, showing little patches of bare earth between its withered blades.

Decay, extinction, death were everywhere the length of trailing silk had swept. The lovely garden was a place of desolation, black and sterile as the plains of Sodom when Jehovah's fire fell on them.

And then the vision faded in the wreaths of whirling incense smoke, and he was kneeling on the Peking-blue soft rug before the tablets of his ancestors. But in his ears still sounded echoes of the Mongols' charge.

"Be pleased to take my humble thanks, O Lady of the Moon," he murmured as he rose from his knees, for his quick, subtle Oriental brain had solved the allegory. He thought—he knew!—he understood the meaning of the vision.

VII

The Silver-Skinned One

"ELDER brother," he asked Mr. Fung, his number one clerk and confidential agent, "do you know the stopping place of Ning Pao?"

"The stricken one?" asked Mr. Fung as he bent in a bobbing bow before his employer. His usually bland, butter-yellow face was marked by a look of almost ludicrous concern, and the pudgy, comfortable little hands laced across his sleekly rounded stomach fluttered a little.

"Even he, my venerable one."

"But, of course, nobility. Does not your plum-blossom jadeship contribute to his well-being? Have I not gone to his abode with presents of—"

"Quite so. And you will go again tonight, most venerable cousin. You will take this to him and request he wear it next his jasmine-scented skin without removing it until I send for it again."

"That?" Mr. Fung's question was like the squeak of an astonished mouse. His

little eyes were fixed in fascination on the length of gleaming silk that trailed across the other's arm.

It was an Indian shawl, a *sari* worthy of a *maharani*. Pale rose it was in some lights, and a delicate, pale apple-green in others, and shot through it were flashes of bright orange and the purple of blood-mulberries, and the iridescent blue-green of dragon flies. Around its edge there ran a fringe of pure-gold wire strung at the tip with seed pearls and small uncut diamonds. It had cost three thousand dollars in Bombay, as Mr. Fung well knew, and the duty on it was almost as much more, yet the Benevolent Presence ordered him to take it to Ning Pao and bid him wear it next his skin. "Thou art a thousand years old, and thy wisdom is as that of the Five Classics, O Flower of Jade," said Mr. Fung and went to do his master's bidding.

WHERE Pell and Doyers Streets meet Mr. Fung paused by the blank wall of the Hip Sing Tong House, plastered with red and white posters on which were daubed in Chinese characters the current gossip of Chinatown. "A thousand years, wise elder brother," Wah Ken the beggar accosted him. "This alley of entirely unimpressive hovels is indeed enlightened by thy jadelike radiance."

"And yet another century, O father of a hundred scented charms," Mr. Fung replied conventionally as he felt for a coin. Then, in a lowered voice, "How goes it with Ning Pao, the silver-skinned one? Does he yet abide at the felicitous mansion of Wah Ching in Mott Street?"

"Ning Pao?" the beggar echoed, and his slanted eyelids lowered over rheumy eyes as he held both hands straight down before him, balled his fists and moved his stiffened arms across each other with a scissors motion—the universal Chinese gesture to ward off the evil eye and other dire calamities. "*Ahee, ahoo, hoh!* He has transferred the brilliance of his countenance to the home of Hin Ching, effulgence. The health inspectors of the barbarians were hard upon his trail, like hounds that track the wounded tiger—"

"A thousand years, and yet another year, most venerable," Mr. Fung dropped a half-dollar into Wah Ken's palm and turned toward Chatham Square.

Everyone in Chinatown knew of Ning Pao the leper, and every yellow mother's son and daughter of them was in league against the Health Department of the City of New York to keep him from incarceration in a pest-house or deportation to his native Canton. Chinatown cared for its own. Its indigents received alms from its prosperous tradesmen, those who transgressed its code were summarily dealt with by its "honorable hatchet-men." Its sick were dosed with nostrums from Chinese pharmacies. When a resident died his bones were sent back to his native soil for burial, for that was meet and altogether proper, but to have one of its denizens imprisoned in a white man's lazar-house or sent ingloriously back to China under guard—that would entail a loss of face. So Ning Pao, though the course of his disease had almost stripped the ulcerated flesh from his bones, was tended and cared for, shuttled from one refuge to another, and guarded from the minions of the city health department.

"Prosperity attend thee, O highly-favored one," Mr. Fung clasped hands across his stomach and bowed formally to the wretched creature on the filthy iron cot beneath the skylight of Hin Ching's attic. "This person is delighted at the brilliance of thy jadelike countenance and brings thee almond-scented messages of felicitation." He slurred the formal Chinese compliments in a firm voice, but his little flat nose twitched and trembled like a nervous rabbit's, and there was a comically lop-

sided expression on his round face. He wanted more than anything to turn and run, but he had a duty to perform.

"This ill-conditioned outcast from an obscure city feels the sun-warmth of thy presence, august one," replied the leper in a rasping whisper. The mucuous membrane of his mouth and throat had thickened with the advance of his leprosy till breathing was a labor and speech almost beyond him, but the amenities had to be observed.

Mr. Fung's round eyes traveled to the spot of rain-stain on the ceiling and remained there. He could not bear to look at Ning Pao. Where the filthy cotton bandage had slipped aside the leper's face stared like a skull, the flesh brayed clean from the bone. One hand was gone entirely and the other lacked two fingers. Where the skin showed it was white as ashes, and rough as the bark of an oak tree.

"I bring thee tidings of good cheer, most highly-esteemed one," continued Mr. Fung, intent on finishing his business as soon as possible. "Thus says my master Yuan Shan-tsi, the Manchu prince whom I delight to serve: 'Bear this exquisite garment to my elder cousin Ning Pao and bid him wear it next his jasmine-petal skin till I require it of him again.' " From its paper wrapping Mr. Fung drew out the scintillating silk *sari* and tossed it on the reeking mattress beside Ning Pao.

"I—wear a wondrous thing like that?" the leper looked bewilderment from his remaining eye. "Did the jadelike Yuan Shan-tsi leave his wits behind him when he came back from the wars? Why does he wish me to wear it?"

Mr. Fung's fat shoulders rose in a shrug that announced his complete dissociation from the transaction. "Does the ball ask of the player why he strikes it, or the buffalo require reasons for the course the driver sets? I know only the Prince Yuan Shan-tsi requires this of thee, and in requittal for thy service bids this person give thee this, which makes a truth of falsehood and turns evil into good." From his pocket he drew five gold pieces and stacked them in a little column on the floor. "Five times twenty of the white man's dollars are there, little brother. More than a hundred taels of Haikwan silver."

Ning Pao's one eye shone with quickening avarice. "The shadow moves as the sun directs," he rasped as he slipped the dirt-encrusted blouse from his shoulders and wound the glowing *sari* around them. "*Abee*, is it not truly written, 'He who heeds the commands of authority shall never want for rice'?"

VIII

The Wedding Gift

AFTER four years' absence the little apartment was unchanged. Everything was just as he'd remembered it, the white-upholstered furniture, the white rugs on the black floor, the Ming vase on the mantelpiece and the jade libation-cup beside it—all through the war, all through the months at the recuperation station, all through the trip to India and China and the long voyage home he'd thought of it. The picture of it was so firmly printed on his retina that he had only to close his eyes to see its every detail. And with it was another memory, the vision of her as she danced for him the night before he went to camp, the pressure of her mouth on his, the sweetness of her perfumed body in his arms, then their hurried journey to Connecticut and their marriage by the justice of the peace——

"And so you're going to marry Harold Van Vliet?" he asked, when she had greeted him a little apprehensively. "He's one of the best, Ramalha, but he's been hurt. Dreadfully hurt, it's no joke to be

almost blind at twenty-five. He deserves well of life—and you."

His voice was casual and friendly, not at all reproachful, but she chose to read reproach in it.

"I suppose you think that I'm incapable of loving anybody, after the shabby way I treated you?" Her eyelids flickered and her lips and chin quivered like a little child about to cry. "I know I gave you a raw deal, Shan-tsi, but Grigsby put me up to it. He made me—"

"Your Uncle Grigsby"—he spoke with elaborate unconcern—"has passed the Dragon Gate, as they say in China?"

"The Dragon Gate?"

"Precisely. Joined his honorable ancestors. Passed on as the Western euphemism has it."

"Yes, he's dead, and I'm glad of it! If it hadn't been for him I'd never have treated you so shamefully. I always liked you, Shan, but I never loved you as a woman ought to love the man she marries—"

"I understand," he broke in gently. "You were forced to play a sort of Trilby to his Svengali. Poor little—" His voice trailed off to vague silence. *Don't overdo it, you fool!* he told himself. *She's no simpleton.* But:

"Yes, that's exactly it!" she snatched his bait like a hungry trout. "He *made* me do those despicable things, Shan, but now he's gone and I'm my own woman. Don't you think I have the right to some happiness, Shan? All those years that I was Grigsby Alcock's slave I had to do as he directed. I dared not give my love to any man, or even my friendship—" Her voice was gentle, pleading, and the big tears filled her eyes as she looked at him, begging his forgiveness and agreement.

"Of course. Happiness is like gold, to be taken where we find it, and taken quickly, before somebody steals it from us. And—" he bent a smile of positively Confucian benignity on her—"just to show there are no hard feelings, I've brought you a small wedding gift."

"A gift?" Her eyes were dancing with anticipation. "Oh, Shan, how lovely!"

But when he opened the Korean-work casket of sandalwood inlaid with bronze and tortoiseshell and drew his offering from it she was speechless.

SHE knew values and appreciated beauty, especially in feminine adornment, and this superb work of the weaver's art held both. It was worthy of a *maharani,* a shawl of pale rose silk which seemed to turn to delicate applegreen in some lights, shot through with flashes of bright orange and the purple of blood-mulberries, with here and there the iridescent blue-green of the dragon fly. Around its edge there ran a fringe of pure-gold wire strung at the tip with seed pearls and small uncut diamonds.

"Why, Shan," she found speech with an effort, "it's the loveliest thing I've ever seen! And it's for me?"

"Especially for you," he agreed with a soft laugh.

"Then you must help me put it on!" she ordered with a show of mock imperiousness as she held the length of gleaming, jewel-fringed silk out to him and posed before the mirror.

He crossed the clinging scarf above her narrow hips, drew a corner under her left arm and folded it across her bosom, then with a deft tug drew it behind her, leaving one arm free, one bound by the silken sheath, and draped the jewel-set end across her head like a hood.

"Oh!" she exclaimed as he completed the arrangement. "It scratched me, Shan—you pulled it too tight. I'm scratched beneath the arm and on the back."

"How clumsy of me!" he apologized. "I'd dreadfully sorry, Flower of the Moonlight—"

"Oh, never mind. It's nothing, really.

A little powder on the scratches and I'll be good as new." She smiled at her reflection in the glass, then, rising on her toes to do a pirouette, "Would you like a drink before you go?"

"Before—" he raised slim eyebrows interrogatively.

"Yes. I feel like a pig, rushing you off this way when you've hardly come, but I'm still a working girl, you know, and have to be at the theatre before eight o'clock."

He took the cocktail she proffered, raised it toward her and smiled at her across the glass.

"To you, O Flower of the Moonlight. May you have the happiness that you deserve, and may Death give you timely notice of His coming."

"Why, Shan!" she reproved. "Is that a nice thing to say to a girl just when she's going to be married?"

"I'm sorry. I'd hoped you'd like it. I seem to remember that the Christian prayer book has a petition against sudden death in it."

"That's true," she agreed somberly. Then the dimples showed each side her mouth. "But I'd rather have you say *ch'eung sang* to me."

"*Ch'eung sang*—long life to you!" he answered dutifully as they drained their glasses.

IX

Diagnosis

DR. NORDEMAN looked grave. When Dr. Early had referred the case to him with the notes of his findings he had been inclined to laugh. There hadn't been a well authenticated case of *lepra vera* in a white person in New York for more than twenty years. Still——

The beautiful young woman on the table showed some symptoms he did not like. On each cheek was a smooth, ash-white spot which—now her make-up was removed—showed like an inlay of dead flesh against the healthy tissue. There was another livid area on her back some six inches below the hairline, and the ulna nerve of her left arm showed marked enlargement at the elbow.

He took a camel's hair brush and poised it over her left cheek. "Close the eyes," he ordered, and tell me when you feel this tickle." He drew the brush across her chin.

"I feel it, Doctor."

"H'm. And now?" He traced the soft brush down her brow.

"Yes."

"H'm." The doctor took a small syringe and pressed it gently in the white spot on her left cheek. "Feel anything?"

"No, sir."

"U'm-h'm." He laid the first syringe aside and drew a little blood into a second from her right cheek, then used a third to suck a tiny sample from the white patch on her cheek. "You're sure I didn't hurt you?" he asked, scribbling labels for the syringes.

"No, Doctor. I felt no pain at all."

"Very well. That will be all today. I'd like to have you call tomorrow evening, though."

Two hours later he looked up as his assistant knocked. "Well, Grandison?"

"I can't believe it, Doctor, but—"

"Your beliefs or disbeliefs are unimportant, Grandison. Tell me what did you find?"

"I made slides and stained the specimens with cobol fuchin and methylene gentian violet, and—"

"Never mind describing the process, Grandison. I taught it to you, remember. What did you find?"

"*Lepraе bacilli*—in abundance—sir. It's incredible, but we've a case of *lepra vera*—true leprosy—on our hands, Doctor! What are you going to do?"

X

Unclean!

"UNCLEAN! Unclean!" Over and over the drums of her mind beat the word into her brain. Lepers no longer had to wear a special dress and clang a bell in warning as they walked, but as they were in Bible-times so they were today—"Unclean!"

The doctor had been very gentle, almost cheerful, with her. He'd talked of the strides science made, told her of the curative effects of chaulmooga and hydrocarpus oil. But he hadn't fooled her! She'd heard about the lepers of Port Said and Canton, dreadful maimed things holding out their beggar's bowls for alms and stretching out the stumps of handless arms and footless legs to excite sympathy. *Unclean!*

She let herself in with her latchkey and paused upon the threshold, breathing with hard, laboring sobs. In every corner of the room she seemed to see hunched and deformed things crouching, poised and panting, waiting for the time to pounce.

She sank her teeth into her lower lip to still its trembling and staggered toward the bedroom. Unclean! The dreadful word seemed echoing with a thundrous clamor from floor and walls and ceiling. The terror that had gripped her throat was in her stomach now. There was a frantic, stifled feeling in her breast beside her heart. "No—*no!*" she moaned as she dragged her pert, small hat off and dropped it to the floor. "Not that—anything but that!" Her bronze hair flamed like molten metal as its coils unloosened and fell cataracting down each side her face, reaching almost to her knees.

The thought struck her in midstep and she turned unsteadily and tottered toward the bathroom. Why wait for it? Why wait until her beauty had become a thing of foul and monstrous frightfulness? Why drag the years of awful waiting out in a pesthouse——

"*Caution,*" read the notice on the sleeping tablets bottle. "*This medicine is to be taken only on a physician's prescription, and then only exactly in accordance with directions. An overdose may lead to*——" She wrenched the cap off of the phial, counting out the little pellets in her palm. She'd never taken more than one before—"Three, four, five—a dozen!"

The water cooled her parched throat gratefully as she washed the little white pills down. She felt calmer, almost peaceful, now. She'd lie down on the bed a while—

The room seemed strangely shadowed as she walked toward the bed. Her feet—her little dancing feet that had never made an awkward movement—felt strangely heavy, as if she waded waist-deep in water, and there was a humming sound in her ears. She stumbled, caught her balance with an effort and went on a step or two, tripped again and slipped gently to her knees. Then like a little girl tired out with play she dropped full-length to the floor, pillowing her cheek on her arm. The glowing, bronze-gold hair swirled round her face in a warm, sensuous cloud——

XI

Bon Voyage

THE final gong-stroke faded to an echo on the still air, and like the whisper of a breeze through crisping leaves there came the subdued rustle that betokens turning heads and craning necks—that almost involuntary gesture that even well-bred people make at such times.

A momentary halt at the church door while six frock-coated young men raised their burden shoulder-high, then: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want——"

the clergyman's well modulated, slightly unctuous voice sounded as he marched up the aisle before the flower-laden casket. "He leadeth me beside the still waters—"

The afternoon sun slanted through a stained-glass panel, glinting mellowly upon the dull mahogany of the pews. Here and there it picked out spots of color, a flower, a woman's hat, a man's necktie. Through a memorial window came a single beam of amber-tinted light that struck back tiny echoes from the silver mountings of the casket. A quartette sang "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere" and the minister spoke feelingly of the young life blighted before it had a chance to grow from bud to blossom.

A tenor rendered "Crossing the Bar," the pallbearers arose to their appointed task, and once again the solemn parade passed between the close-packed pews. A momentary lull came in the outside traffic as the suave mortician appeared on the church steps, then a motor purred up to the curb, the hearse moved forward, and the procession was on its way to Fresh Pond Crematorium.

The sidewalk buzzed with scraps of conversation: "Poor Ramalha! What could have *made* her do it? And she was to be married to that rich young Harold Van Vliet——"

AMONG the close-shaved, over-tailored men and over-coiffed women with too many diamonds and too much heady perfume he seemed incongruous as a falcon in a flock of brightly feathered songbirds. In his dark-gray, formally cut suit and black Homburg, with a white carnation in his lapel and a blackthorn stick hung in the bend of his left elbow, he was a figure to arrest attention. More than one curious glance was cast at him as he stood at the curb and looked along the street where already the last car of the funeral procession glimmered intermittently in the swirling cross-currents of traffic.

"Bon voyage, Ramalha," he murmured as the funeral cortege gathered speed and disappeared. Then, with the ghost of an ironic smile, *"Ch'eung sang*—longevity to you."

He readjusted his hat, squared his shoulders and set off toward the Avenue, his stick tucked jauntily beneath his arm. This was his victory. He had taken full-measured payment for betrayed trust; he had regained the face that he and all his clan and family lost when Grigsby Alcock and the woman victimized him; he had prevented her from breaking Van Vliet's heart and faith as she had broken his.

But the taste of triumph was as ashes in his mouth. The world seemed dead and empty as the craters of a burned-out moon. His footsteps echoed hollowly against his ears, like a drum beaten in a deserted theatre. For almost five years he had loved this woman—and hated her. But had his hate been stronger than his love? He could not say. He did not know. He knew only that she would be with him forever, that the memory of her was a candle-flame no wind of marching years could ever dim.

The Write Background

Manly Bannister, the new writer whose story *Satan's Bondage* is the novelette which leads in this issue, tells us that he's doubly thrilled . . . for not only is this one his first tale in W. T.—but it's also his first magazine story ever to be accepted! From Kansas City, Kansas, he writes us:

AT a very early age, my fingers unaccountably became stuck firmly to the keys of a typewriter, and I seem somehow never to have been able to shake them quite free. Although I now live in the Kansas part of Kansas City, I came originally from the Pacific Northwest where somber forests of fir and pine make delightfully deep shadows for werewolves to race in when the moon is high and full.

Although writing is my desired profession, I have done a little bit of everything under the sun. In college, I worked for my tuition laying concrete and varnishing dormitory furniture. I have picked hops and fruit and berries in Oregon's rich Willamette Valley and for a rather long and painful period earned my living washing dishes in restaurants.

For a time I sailed in the black gang of several oil tankers all over the Pacific Ocean. As a matter of fact, when an enemy submarine sank the tanker *Montebello* several months ago, it also sank the first ship I ever sailed on.

Finally, I drifted into the Midwest, where I have lived the past two years. Every day I write an enormous amount of radio continuity copy for KCKN in Kansas City, Kansas. So you see, writing is my daily work as well as a side-line profession.

I have been earnestly writing free-lance material since I was fifteen, and I'm twenty-eight now—all of which means I have come up the hard way. And I still have a long way to go; but with perseverance, hard work, and luck, I'll make it the rest of the way. What were my first stories? Fantasy, to be sure! 'Way back in the late twenties I received my first rejection slip from WEIRD TALES!

Ever since I was a wee creature, I have been interested in the unknown, the occult, the unseen. Fact or fiction, I gobble up whatever I find on the subject. Lycanthropy has always held a particular fascination for me. That fellow with the wolfish jaw and pointed teeth you see on a street-car—that lovely woman with the viciously beautiful mouth and strange, nervous ways—who knows about them, what happens to them in the dead still of the night? What supernatural transformations might or might not take place in their bodies when the moon is full and the witches shriek demoniacal invocation to the Prince of Evil? I was taken with the fancy that a man might be a werewolf and not know it. Suppose he were separated from his werewolf parents when still a baby and was unaware of his supernatural heritage? Given the moral background of men and the blood of a lycanthrope in his veins, what would he do when he discovered what he was?

That is the seed which grew and ripened into the story I called *Satan's Bondage*. Evil may seem to conquer for a while, but always

it must be overthrown by Good. I hope the readers of W. T. will agree with me that Kenneth Mulvaney did the only thing possible when confronted with the situation.

Manly Banister

Keep Cool—with WEIRD TALES!

William Morton, of Charleston, Va., suggests a new way to keep cool these sweltering summer days. He writes:

It gets pretty hot in July and August around these parts, but I've found a way to keep cool . . . reading WEIRD TALES! This "Ice Chest" of spine-freezing tales chills the blood in my veins. . . . It's better than air conditioning!

What IS a "WEIRD TALE," Anyway?

In a discussion of weird stories in general and his story *Never the Twain . . .*, and WEIRD TALES in particular, Seabury Quinn writes us from Washington, D. C.

Frankly, despite the help of several dictionaries, I can't arrive at a satisfactory—to me—definition of "weird" as applied to literature. Like a lot of other things, "weird" is one of those which I can define perfectly as long as you don't ask me. Nearly everyone, editor, reader and writer, can spot a weird story instantly, but can he say what makes it weird? I can't, nor do I think that anyone can draw a hard and fast definition within whose terms a story must fall in order to qualify.

Must it have a ghost in it? Then such stories as Ambrose Bierce's *The Man and the Snake*, Tod Robbins' *Silent, White and Beautiful*, and Poe's *Black Cat* and *Tell-Tale Heart* are automatically excluded. Yet who would have the effrontery to label any one of those as "unweird"?

Must it necessarily be read with a degree of psychic discomfort, Montague Summers says yes, but if so Nelson S. Bond's delightful spook of Lancelot Biggs would automatically be excluded from WEIRD TALES, and so would *Roads* and *Song Without Words*.

Must it be so fantastic as to be not even remotely possible? What is, and what is not, nearly or remotely possible? Few authors would be bold enough to risk an editorial "unconvincing" by bringing such characters as John Brown, Robert E. Lee, J. E. B. Stuart and John Wilkes Booth together, yet history shows us that is just what took place in the fall of 1859 at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Unconvincing? Certainly. But true, nevertheless.

So, getting back to somewhere in the general neighborhood of where we started, I'd say that a story may be "weird" though it has no ghost, doesn't scare the daylights out of the reader, and has some remote resemblance to possibility. Ambrose Bierce's *The Man and the Snake*, to retrace our ground a little, and Tod Robbins' *Silent, White and Beautiful*, Poe's *Eleanore* and Major George Fielding Elliot's *The Copper Bowl* all qualify superbly as "weirds," yet none of them contains a ghost and all of them *might* have happened almost, if not exactly, as told.

In compiling his anthology of "the twenty-five best stories of free imagination since Dracula and Frankenstein" Phil Stong included my *House Where Time Stood Still*, in which there was not even an implication of a ghost, and which was predicated upon a set of incidents which might conceivably have happened (though I devoutly hope they never did and never will).

***Never the Twain . . .*, I think, qualifies as a "weird" in the same way *The House Where Time Stood Still* does. It might be called an extension of the "weird surgery" story in that its hero (or villain, as you prefer) dips into "weird medicine" to achieve his ends. Nor do I think the story fails to qualify because (as Mr. Stong says of Frank R. Stockton's work) "the fantasy is an applique on a human situation."**

Seabury Quinn

He Votes in Verse

From New York City Cassian M. Padgett versifies:

Many a chill came up my spine,
As I read the novel by Seabury Quinn,
A story that was three times fine,
As rocking as a right to the chin.
Thus, I give voice, of my first choice.
Now that I've begun,
My next choice is *The Gun*.
***Coven* followed—with I feel,**
***Herbert West* right on its heel.**
Then came Horace the cyclotron,
One swell story, a lot of fun.
With these, the rest could not compare,
Although my rating for them *is fair*.

I close with this, that come what may,
I'll read WEIRD TALES till Judgement Day.

An Open Letter to the "Wizard-y" Gentleman

From Cleveland, Ohio, Mark Cathal writes:

I joined your delightful club quite a few months ago and have not once regretted it. This is my very first effort at contributing. Here's my vote.

Since I've voted for Mr. Quinn's *Is the Devil a Gentleman,* may I speak to Mr. Quinn? I'd like awfully to address myself to the wizard-y gentleman.

I'm an Irishman, and only recently from that lovely land. I know quite a bit about the lore of that greenland—but I've just noticed something. I never heard of any witches in Ireland. Since you must have done a bit of research for your delightful story—perhaps you can tell me—were-oe-are there any witches in Ireland?

Ma'be *you* 'know, Mr. Quinn. . . . You are my favorite author of weird stories—again, thank you, Mr. Quinn, for your delightful tale. Can't you manage another right away quick?

Hope you enjoyed *Never the Twain* . . . in this issue. Won't you let us know?

DEATH OF NICTZIN DYALHIS

It is with great regret that we learned of the death of Nictzin Dyalhis, the well known fantasy author. Mr. Dyalhis has written for WEIRD TALES since 1925. His first story, *When the Green Star Waned,* was his most famous—and proved so popular that it was reprinted. He followed this with eight others—his last being *Heart of Atlantan* in 1940. We know many readers will miss him from our pages.

* * * * *

The Green Star Has Waned a Little More

On May 8th, at 10:20 A.M., death by heart failure came to Nictzin Dyalhis, author of The Sapphire Goddess, The Sea Witch, When the Green Star Waned, and many another famous Weird Tales.

It is my duty to write of him, because it was my privilege to know him as no other member of the fantasy circle was able to know him. I should not like to number the unforgettable week-ends I spent at his home in Salisbury, Maryland—foregoing sleep for days and nights, talking, or, more often, listening fascinated to the endless story of his life.

He spoke as he wrote—naturally, eagerly, colorfully. His printed stories, which painted so realistically of worlds you and I have never known except in those stories, were, he said, based largely upon his own personal experiences in the very worlds he described. On this Green Star alone, Nictzin Dyalhis had lived his sixty-three years as adventurously as any mortal could wish.

He had known wealth and poverty. He had lived much in the Orient, and had known intimately its splendor and squalor. A tiny blue dragon, tattooed on a vein on his wrist, proclaimed him a member of a Chinese occult society. He was one of the few white men to enter Tibet and leave with its secrets. Once he had stained his body and bluffed his way into a genuine voodoo ceremony in Haiti. For many years, Rudyard Kipling was a close friend.

Had he wanted a signature other than his own for his published fantasies, I doubt whether even he could have manufactured a more striking pen-name than Nictzin Dyalhis. Many must have thought (as I did at first) that he was using a pen-name. But Nictzin Dyalhis was his real name. *Nic* I'm not sure of, but *Tzin* means something wonderful to the Mexican Indians to whom he was related. And the name *Dyalhis* goes back thousands of years, through his Scotch-English ancestry, to the Roman god *Flamen Dialis*—from which were also derived the names *Dallas* and *Douglas.*

Nictzin Dyalhis was a real person, too. That wasted little old tubercular body of his housed a spirit as eager and ageless as an angel's—and as generous. But he was impatient with this world, because he had so often traveled more wonderful ways.

I don't know to which world the gods have delivered him this time. But I'm sure of this—he's no stranger there.

Willis Conover

READERS' VOTE

SATAN'S BONDAGE	WHO ARE THE LIVING?
DEATH HAS RED HAIR	HERBERT WEST· REANIMATOR (III)
A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE	EYES OF THE PANTHER
SPIDER MANSION	VIS'BILITY· ZERO
THE BRIDLE	NEVER THE TWAIN . .

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it into us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, N. Y. C.

WEIRD TALES CLUB

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York N. Y.

Write to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you get together with other fantasy and science-fiction fans. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

Fans Flames of British Fandom

Quite a while ago you sent me the news of the proposed formation of a "Weird Tales" Club, for publication in my then magazine "The Futurian." However since then much water has flowed under bridges and many changes have occurred. The Futurian has become a sort of co-operative production under the title of FUTURIAN WAR DIGEST and has been endeavoring to keep together the dying embers of British fandom, with so far, an amazing amount of success in spite of air-raids, call-ups, evacuations and "bombings-out."

I was surprised and pleased to note the progress of the Weird Tales Club and am therefore applying at once, to join you.

I'd be pleased to send copies of my magazine to any American fantasy fan in exchange for copies of WEIRD TALES—any issues since January, 1940—75 cents worth representing a year's subscription. Any copies of your magazine which I happened to already possess could easily be passed on to other Britishers missing it badly.

J. Michael Rosenblum.

4 Grange Terrace, Chapeltown,
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Plan to Explore Brazil's "Lost World"

May I thank you for publishing my letter in your March issue. Since the issue appeared on the U.S.A. newsstands, early in January, I have received communications from readers of W.T. in all parts of the U. S., also Canada and Hawaii.

At this point I hope you will allow me to also thank all those who wrote me, whom I was unable to answer. Had I tried, it would by this time have been necessary for me to employ a secretary. Let me say "Thanks to all of you and best wishes."

Of those with whom I am in close contact there are eight. One of the group, a young man now serving in Uncle Sam's Army, a descendant from New England ancestry of seafaring men, pioneers and explorers; and himself a true explorer at heart, is determined to penetrate the interior of the Matta Grosso Jungle Territory at some not too distant future date (we hope) when World Affairs are settled. His zest and spirit has infused the small group of correspondents likewise. Consequently we are all looking forward to the future when this dream will become a reality, since we too have many interests in common, and our various reasons and desires for wishing to ferret out more concerning that vast Brazilian area where so many ancient origins are said to be hidden.

We all realize the hardships and seriousness of such an enterprise. However we are certain it will materialize.

Perhaps through the medium of Weird Tales, which has served as a nucleus in forming this group, something of importance may ensue for the future. Stranger things have happened.

Before closing, allow me one more line to say a word of greeting to the gentleman Mystic, who visited me before I was aware my letter had been published in W.T. To him I say—"I purchased the book which you mentioned and also read many you suggested with great interest. I am now reading 'The Secret Doctrine' by Blavatsky which I find extremely enlightening. I do hope I may hear from you again and trust you are well."

So you see Dear Editors, you are affording many of your readers double pleasure, and perhaps the possibility of opportunity, by publishing their letters in the Eyrie and WEIRD TALES CLUB pages.

Dorothy Lorch.

5754 N. 17th St., Phila., Pa.

Ghost of Jesse James

The Gun by Frank Gruber was a clever tale, well rounded out by a smooth and tricky ending. I also enjoyed *Coven* and *Poor Little Tampico*. However, *The Gun* held the most appeal for me, primarily because of the reference to Jesse W. James, the great American train robber. He was one of the products of the border warfare between eastern Kansas and western Missouri in the days of the "Red Legs" and the "Bushwackers" preceding the Civil War. Mr. Gruber's physical description of "Mr. Howard" is not entirely correct. He leaves one with the impression that Jesse was a huge man of large proportions. On the contrary, Jesse was of average height, deep-chested but on the slender side. The Kansas City Times described him as follows at the time of his death:

"Jesse James was above five feet eleven inches in height, of a rather solid, firm and compact build, yet rather of the slender type. His hair was black, not overly long; blue eyes, well shaded with dark lashes, and the entire lower portion of his face was covered by a full growth of dark-brown or sun-browned whiskers, which are not long and shaggy but are trimmed and bear evidence of careful attention. He was neatly clad in a business suit of cassimere, of dark brown substance, which fit him very neatly. He wore a shirt of spotless whiteness, with collar and cravat, and looked more the picture of a staid and substantial business man than the outlaw and desperado that he was."

I am a member of the W. T. Club and I would like to share the correspondence of anyone who is familiar with the legends and facts pertaining to the James boys, the Younger brothers, Will Quantrill, Todd and Anderson, and any others of that bloody era in American history.

Gratefully yours,

Thomas C. O'Neill

172 W. 12th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Queen's Science-Fiction League

The members of the Queens Science Fiction League desire to join the WEIRD TALES CLUB —and to form a chapter of the CLUB in Queens.

We'd welcome new members to our ranks.

Mrs. F. Sykora,
Sec'y Queens S. F. L.

P. O. Box 85, Elmont, N. Y.

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Those who are interested should communicate with me, immediately.

Claude Bertram Weaver,
Executive Secretary, The Sphinx Club.
62 Orange Street, Suite 102
Worcester, Mass.

Want to "Raise Hell"!

My friends and I are studying Black Magic and I would greatly appreciate it if members could send us a list of books on formulas for demon raising and other ceremonies. These books should have materials needed for experiments printed in with the formulas.

James Madole.
224 East Main St., Beacon, New York.

P.S. Please send price.

Can anyone help out Mr. Madole?

Will Barter Ghosts

I should like very much to exchange local legends and ghost stories with members of WEIRD TALES CLUB. Each of them doubtless has personal knowledge of some haunted house in his neighborhood. I am especially interested in the history, peculiar manifestations and appearance of all such houses in America.

In return for these accounts (and snapshots *always* tell a great deal, too), I will send very interesting information concerning the myths, witchcraft and supernatural lore of this vicinity. I have collected considerable data concerning voodooism in the West Indies and the little-known practices of the Indians in the interior of Panama.

So—lay on, Macduff—and I'll return tale for tale, photograph for photograph!

Osmer Garretson.
Balboa, Canal Zone.

P.S. Did I mention the fact that WEIRD TALES is for even the serious student of Occultism, a veritable encyclopedia of the arcane? I meant to.

May It Never End

Please add my name to your esteemed club roster—may it never end—and send me one of Bok's beautifully designed membership cards. Congratulations on a swell idea. Let's hope, when the war is over, and the Pacific is divided equally with the Japs—the Japs with the bottom half—

that a WEIRD TALES CLUB pin can be made.

Bill Blackbeard.

216 Orchid Avenue,
Corona del Mar, California.

Berserk

In 1933 I picked up my first copy of WEIRD TALES, and since then they have been a necessary need in my reading list each month.

It's a fine magazine, and one in which an author can go berserk without any objections from the gallery.

There was a period of years when I used to wonder about the occult, but I no longer wonder now, for I have come to the conclusion that what we don't know won't hurt us, and maybe that air of uncertainty that has always been associated with mythology, and the type of legend stories, fiction, etc., that your magazine publishes is better so left that way.

If we knew for certain that there were no such animals, then the zest, the kick would be taken out of the story. The very fact that we don't know, and that someday . . . it may happen to you . . . spices my reading with a faint trace of the personal element.

I will be proud to belong to your club, and will consider your little card not only a token of my chosen taste in reading, but a valued possession as well.

C. A. Myers.

C. A. Myers, RM1C,
Coast Guard Base, New London, Conn.

The Club of Clubs

Kindly enroll me in "The Club of Clubs." A group that deals solely in the weird and unknown has long been sought after by this seeker of fantasy.

Your magazine is tops in giving a very fine assortment of exercises for the imagination.

Thanking you for this opportunity, I am

Yours sincerely,

Ralph A. Carl, Jr., GM2c
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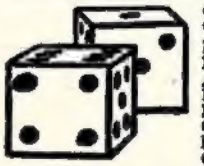
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Leonard Grunberg, 97 Arden St., N. Y. City
Kay Brickman, 68 W. 107th St., N. Y. City
Melvin Henriksen, 550 W. 168th St., N. Y. City
Rose Alberti, 30-25 Steinway St., Astoria, N. Y.
Robert J. Thompson, 44 Norgate Rd., Manhasset, N. Y.
Mrs. Frances Sykoro, P. O. Box 84, Elmont, N. Y.
H. McDuffey, 6144 S. Carpenter St., Chicago, Ill.
Bill Caple, 412 N. School St., Lodi, California
James C. Vestal, U. S. Marine Hosp., Stapleton, Staten Island, N. Y.
Laurence Di Gangi, 727 N. Springfield Ave., Chicago, Ill.
E. Cowan, 1201 9th, Portsmouth, Ohio
R. L. Martire, 36 Glendale Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.
Everett Booth, Jr., 2006 Court, Memphis, Tenn.
Ed Stack, 550 W 20th St., N. Y. City.
Pvt. Peter Pizzo, No. 36109186, Battery E. 57th C. A., Schofield Br., T. H.
Louis Perkins, 341 Marguerite Ave., Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio
Maridon Gordon Miller, 182 Dundas St., Apt. 3, London, Ontario, Canada
Barbara Jacobs, 8708 First Ave., North Bergen, N. J.
Edwin Dross, 1346 Walton St., Chicago, Ill.
Frank Bates, Co. 1986, C.C.C., Camp Crescent Bluff, N. P. (D),-1 , Salinas, Calif.
Conny Leigh Hill, 1406 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.
Gertrude M. Carr, Box 177, Manette (East Bremerton), Washington
John Pearson, 2016 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Bertis Burns, P. O. Box 465, Suisun, Calif.
Henry Lounley, 931 Fairbanks Ave., Cinn, Ohio
Judy Puterbaugh, 1608 Alberta St., Dayton, Ohio
Beatrice A. Brownlee, 460 Clayton St., Denver, Colo.
June Hayden, 925 W. Montrose Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Iona Self, Casar, N. C.
Vincent Mulcahy, 3500 Beach Ave., Chicago, Ill.
John Hopkins, Kazabazua, Quebec, via Ottawa
Miss M. Horning, Rt. 2, Box 93, Kenosha, Wisconsin
Beatrice A. Brownlee, 460 Clayton St., Denver, Colo.
William Anton, 2453 N. Hope St., Philadelphia, Pa.
John Murtha, 204 Willow, Hoboken, N. J.
Pfc. Ray Hoff, Casual Detachment, Station Complement, Indiantown Gap, Pa.
Earle Dodge, 3034 Adeline St., Berkeley, Calif.
Robert Whiddon, 1416 16th Ave., South Birmingham, Ala.
William E. Maclay, 34 Faunce Rd., Mattapan, Mass.
June H. Nelson, 1622 Eutaw Pl., Baltimore, Md.
Wallace Ellerbrock, 416 S. Clinton, St., Iowa City, Ia.
Edwin R. Loving, c/o J. D. Prewitt, Powhattan, Kas.
Rose Finnegan, 313 Cedar St., Anaconda, Mont.
John J. Brummel, 3308 W. 59th Pl., Chicago, Ill.
Miss Sandra King, 108 S. Electric Ave., Alhambra, Calif.
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Tony Civitarese, VN-11A Cecil Field, U. S. Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida.
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John Dobina, 1504 Alden Ave. S. W., Canton, O.
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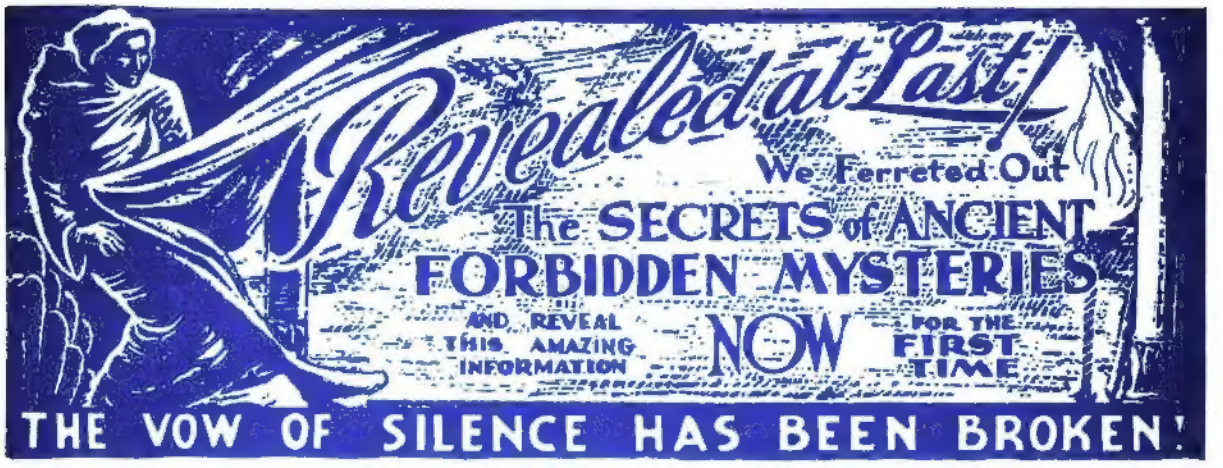
Raymond Pschierer, 130 Avery St., Rochester, N. Y.
Sgt. Jamie McTooth, 702 Benston Pl., Baltimore, Md.
John Sale, 813 5th St., East, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
James Archer, 37 Public Works Department, U. S. Naval Operating Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba
Howard Barnes, 560 Central Ave., Oshkosh, Wisc.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.



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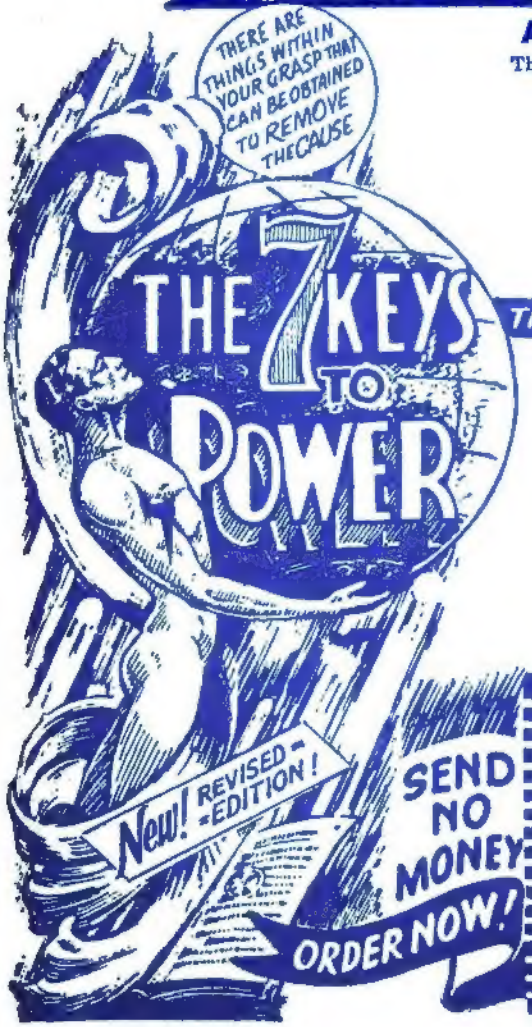

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